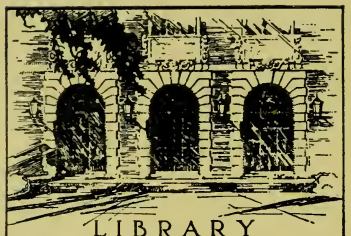
The Woman He Loved

by

A. N. Homer



Reprint

THE WOMAN HE LOVED.

THE WOMAN HE LOVED.

A Novel.

BY

A. N. HOMER.

"She was his life,
The ocean to the river of his thoughts,
Which terminated all."

BYRON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CHAPTER I.

IN THE JAWS OF DEATH.

The bustle and excitement on board the "Simoom" was terrific. Those who had witnessed Gerard's daring act of heroism rushed to the side, strained their eyes, and craned their necks to catch a glimpse of him. Appalling and heart-rending, in its anguish and sympathy for a drowning fellow-creature, the cry of "Man overboard," was shouted along the decks.

"There he is; I see him. There they are both, yonder, on the crest of the wave," were the cries from the excited passengers, as they peered through their glasses, crowded to every point of vantage, and stood

huddled together, gesticulating wildly in their anxiety. Even Mrs. Devereaux showed more feeling than one would have given her credit for. The tears stood in her eyes and she trembled in every limb, barely able to support herself, though she gripped the iron rail with all the strength of her white fingers—those pretty, taper fingers that Gerard loved so well. Some of the women had swooned, and others wept, as their weak, kindly hearts, unable to bear the strain, failed them from want of nerve and excess of feeling. But was it to be wondered at, when not one of the bronzed and weather-beaten sailors, who went about their duties steadily, was without that indescribable expression of distress which will and does come into a man's face at such a time? Men whose life, or the best years of it, had been spent at sea, who had rounded Cape Horn a dozen times, and been tanned and hardened by the suns and tempestuous seasons of well-nigh every clime; tough, wrinkled visaged, horny-

handed, old sea dogs, who had seen the same sight before, yet *could* not witness it again without *showing* in their coarse features the goodness and sterling worth of the hearts that beat so truly under those rough exteriors. Was it to be wondered at that mothers hugged their children closer, and thanked God that they were safe, and softly whispered prayers that those two lives might be spared? Wilson had been standing on the main deck when Gerard leapt overboard, and had rushed aft and recognized his master as he rose to the surface. His face blanched with terror at the sight, and tears trickled down his cheeks. Once, and once only, his grief found vent in utterance.

"May God have mercy on the lad!" he cried as he wrung his hands, and then turned away to try what *he* could do to help to save him.

Davis, the skipper, paced the bridge and issued his orders with stern precision. The "Simoom's" engines were reversed; a boat lowered and manned by able and willing

hands pulled away to the rescue. But how fared it with Gerard? No sooner was his head above water than he looked around for the form of the man he had risked his life to save. The roar of the waves sounded in his ears, he was half blinded with the salt spray, and dazed with the leap he had made from such a height. He saw him only some fifty yards away, and struck out with powerful stroke to his help. He knew himself to be a skilful swimmer, but could he keep himself afloat until assistance came? A sick, sinking sensation that he had never known before entered his brave young heart, as he glanced over his shoulder, and saw with horror what a waste of curling, foam-flecked waves lay between him and the steamer. The next instant he turned—his teeth clenched, his brow knit with a look of firm resolution—and struck out to the rescue. Overhead the sky was of cloudless cobalt, the sea sparkled and danced as the fresh breeze lashed the waves and crested them with snowy white, and the sun, still high in the

heavens, shone with brilliant splendour in the clear purity of the atmosphere. Once or twice, as he rose on the heaving bosom of the water, Gerard thought that something white floated ahead of him. He could not be mistaken, no! There it was again. He neared it rapidly, and, with a great cry of thankfulness, recognized the object as a life-buoy, with the name "S.S. Simoom" in black letters painted upon it. The man he had come to save saw it too, and with feeble efforts was endeavouring to reach it. Gerard increased his speed and pushed the buoy before him with all his strength. A few more strokes, and his task was accomplished. Too weak to speak, gasping for breath, and with the pitiless brine gurgling in his throat, with one last effort he gripped the life-line, then raised his eyes to his deliverer's face with an expression written in them which told how deep was his gratitude. And who shall say—what pen can attempt to describe the feelings of the dying towards his saviour for the life thus held out to him? Whatever

may be the return made by him in after years —whether in the seething cauldron of strife and envy, hatred and malice, he forgets, and even repays the debt with ingratitude, at that instant—when he has grasped with the drowning wretch's tenacity the straw which is strong enough to bear him, and feels that he is *saved*—then, at least, however great a villain he may be, his heart is filled with genuine gratitude to his rescuer. Every second seemed like hours. An endless, gnawing misery of years of anguish crowded into those fleeting minutes which passed with Gerard *slowly*—God only knows *how slowly*. His strength was ebbing. He felt it leaving him mercilessly, momentarily, and his breathing became laboured as the pulse beat more feebly. A solid weight, as of lead, pressed upon his broad, muscular chest; his arms and legs ached, and refused to do his bidding, as they stiffened with the unwonted exertion. Once he had laid his hold upon the life-buoy, with the hope that it would support them both, and an awful dread had entered his

heart as it sank beneath the surface. Perhaps it had become rotten with constant exposure, or sodden and less buoyant with frequent coatings of paint; but the fact remained, it would not bear him too. It was hard to die so young, to bid good-bye so soon to all that he loved on earth, its beauties and its pleasures. He knew it all to be so bright, such a glorious world, and only tarnished by those who lived in it, and, if he *must* leave it, *where*, *where was he going?* Into the land of shadowy uncertainty and mystical doubt! Across that terrible abyss, that black, awful gulf which separated him from—he had heard some say —*nothing*, no life beyond, *no heaven.* That thought only entered Gerard's mind in all its blankness *once.* Because *they* believed in no God, no hereafter, should he? He thrust the thought from him. Soft, gentle sayings and memories of his dead father rushed before him, and he lived again those last hours, when he had been permitted to enter on tiptoe the sick room where he lay, and to feel the touch of his hand, so thin and worn with suffering,

yet so kindly, and see his face, sickly and emaciated by long weeks of illness and mortal anguish, yet calm, and pale, and beautiful with God's light, as though the white-winged angels were already closing in about him in readiness to bear away his soul with them to Paradise. Wearily Gerard gazed in the direction of the ship, his sight blurred and dim, his eyes blood-shot; she seemed like some huge, spectral phantom, as he strove to clear his vision and see once more before he sank what held all that to him was dearest. It was of Ada Devereaux he thought the most. To leave her thus. To die without one look from those eyes he loved so well, without one last farewell or gentle word to cheer him in his dying moments, was keenest agony. Awful enough to be face to face with death, to know that the sun would rise so surely on the morrow, *but not for him.* But to be torn from her, to be hurried into eternity, to sink beneath the waves almost within her sight, yet without the pressure of her soft hand, and her voice to bid him good-bye, was the gall and

wormwood which he dreaded most. The end was near now. His childish prayers quivered on his lips; his mind wandered. Again the waters sounded in his ears and closed above his head, as a wave of greater size swept over him, and with resistless power poured its vast foam-crowned volume with mighty weight to bear him down to death. In those last moments he had grown too feeble to hear the shouts of men, the cheers of encouragement, or the quick, powerful jerk of ashen oars as they rattled in the rowlocks, and strong bearded men bent their backs and strained every muscle to bursting in their efforts to reach him. He knew nothing, heard nothing, as death stole upon him, yet, when he rose to the surface willing and able arms were about him to drag him from his watery grave and place him in safety in the "Simoom's" boat.

CHAPTER II.

TO RISE NO MORE.

No sooner was Gerard rescued from his perilous position than consciousness deserted him completely, and he sank into a dead faint. He knew that strong arms were about him, that he was safe, and no more. The instant that he was placed in a reclining posture in the boat, and felt the strange fear of death removed, a powerful reaction set in; nature asserted her sway; his over-taxed frame could support the extreme exertion and physical as well as mental suffering no longer, and he swooned. The seaman he had so gallantly risked all to save, for whom (as he would have done for the most insignificant creature that excited his sympathy) he had unhesitatingly courted death, was in no such exhausted con-

dition. The life-buoy that Gerard swam with and placed within his hands had kept him afloat without the least bodily exertion, and the coolness of the water had served, in a great measure, to restore his strength. Some one had given him some brandy, which he had greedily swallowed, and the powerful stimulant enabled him to support himself in the stern of the boat, where he sat and gazed at the wan features of the man but for whose strong arm and tender heart he would have been long since food for the fishes. Gerard lay stretched out, to all appearance lifeless, his brown hair, damp and covered with brine, clustered about his broad forehead, in which the blue veins stood out in delicate transparency. Pinched and drawn were the lines of his face, and the white lids veiled those eyes which women in after years loved to look upon, for though sadness lurked too visibly in their depths, candour, honesty, and what they discerned as the power to love were there. Women are inquisitive admittedly, and the man they choose to surround with a

halo of romance, because they *think* he has a tale untold, possesses, though he may not care to make use of it, a great power over them, and his finger rests upon the secret spring which would, if pressed, lay bare their hearts, and place them at his mercy. He has awakened keen interest, and having done so, where does he stand, but on the stepping-stone which has brought him to the verge of love.

"Give way, lads, give way, and let's get him aboard," shouted the second officer, who was in charge of the boat. "There's work for the doctor here, and we can do nothing," he added as he rose from his kneeling posture, where he had hung over Gerard in vain attempts to recover him.

The brawny backs bent to their work, and the sinewy hands guided the oars in quick, steady stroke. Were they not returning after having saved two lives? Was not that enough? In ten minutes more they were under the lee of the "Simoom." The davit falls were hooked on, the boat hauled up, and the spray was dashed in showers from

the bows of the huge mail-ship as under steam and sail once again she shaped her course for England. If Gerard could have heard the words of admiration, the looks from soft, lustrous eyes, of more than sympathy, and listened to the torrent of commiserations and kind inquiries which burst from rosy lips of passengers who sustain no part in this story, he would have felt ill at ease. He wanted no such manifestations of approval, and would have stoutly maintained that he had done only as he would be done by. He would have felt that to be regarded as a hero, to be praised to his face, was odious, and placed him in a position of awkwardness only to be got out of by a speedy retreat, or a word which would silence all such absurdities. They might think what they liked, but he had done no more than man should for man, no more than was his duty towards his fellow creature and his God. But as he slowly revived under the assiduous care of the doctor, as his pulse quickened, and sense and feeling returned to him, all that he had gone through

flashed back upon his mind. It was vividly before him again. The plunge, the rush of the waters, and then that long agonizing suspense, that waiting for death, while his breath came shorter and his strength left him; that terrible struggle after he had divested himself of what clothing he could, and husbanded his energies for that last, long effort to keep his head above the waves, and his mouth free from the cruel salt brine which would break in his face, and pour down his swollen, parched throat. He remembered it all too clearly. But what of it? It was over now, and he was again near *her*, on board the same ship. But—but was he in his own cabin? Was he inclosed within the stout iron beams of the old "Simoom?" The thought made him open his eyes with a start and mutter audibly:

"Ada! Ada!"

Yes; there they were: lots of odds and ends which belonged to him. His gun case, a bundle of sticks, and some fishing rods; ivory-backed brushes ornamented with his mono-

gram in silver, a case of razors, a hunting flask, some studs, littered the marble stand which served alike for dressing-table and cleansing purposes. His thoughts had not belied him, he was in his own berth. Wearily and with difficulty, for even the muscles of his neck felt strained and sore, he turned his head, and his gaze met that of Wilson. A cloud crossed the honest fellow's face; he had overheard his master's first words, and it pained him that they should be of *her*. It was another proof, if such evidence were needed, to convince him how thoroughly Ada Devereaux had him in leading strings—how completely her charms had subjugated and laid him at her feet, to do with as she pleased. It was for her now to be harsh or to caress, to be true to, or to deceive, as she listed. And still inwardly Wilson feared and loathed her, and could not divest himself of the idea that a heavy load, a curse, had been laid upon Gerard's shoulders on that evening when he had first met her in the sultry dusk of the Indian night, and the sweet strains of the

band had re-echoed through the leafy glades of the Eden gardens—a curse, which to Wilson's foreboding spirit would prove well-nigh too heavy to bear. But despite his inward irritation, he possessed too much respect, blended with common sense, to allude to the chance mention of her name. "Thank God as you are safe, Mr. Gerard," he broke forth, unable to control his feelings longer. "I'll never forget that moment when I heard shouts o' 'Man overboard,' and rushed to the side and see'd your head a-risin' above the water. I'll never forget the awful dread and the fear that came into my heart and made me feel just fit for bustin', Mr. Gerard. No! not to my dyin' day, and you a-strugglin' to keep up, and all along of it, me just no better than a child to help you." Tears stood in the man's eyes and coursed down his cheeks.

"You're a good, kind soul, Wilson, and would that I had ever known what it was to have hearts about me as honest and true, and who cared what became of me as much as you

do, instead of losing in my childhood the only one who cared two straws whether I lived or died." The bitter reproach on his mother's want of love and forgetfulness of him, had left Gerard's lips almost before he knew it. He had never meant to utter to mortal ears aught that could cast a slur upon her name, so he added quickly, extending his hand as he spoke, "Wilson, forget what I have said, it was not intended."

"Very good, sir; your orders shall be obeyed, but it's not for the likes o' me to be touchin' you. Though I have served you, and your father before you, faithful, I couldn't take no such liberty, sir. Tell me to do any blessed thing as you chooses and I'll do it, no matter what, but to be shakin' hands with you, sir, goes clean agin' my conscience; it's a steppin' out o' my place and I won't do it —that's flat, Mr. Gerard."

"Well, just as you like, Wilson. I know your worth, and when the right time comes I shall not forget it. Is the seaman—I don't

know his name, but the man I jumped overboard after—is he safe?"

"Yes, sir, and doin' better than you are yourself, and beggin' your pardon, Mr. Gerard, but the doctor's orders was that you was to be kept quiet and not disturbed, because sleep was the only thing to bring you to rights." Even as his servant spoke Gerard's eyes closed, and an expression of intense weariness and languor overspread his face. His lips moved, but he made no answer, and in a few seconds after Wilson had left the berth he fell into a deep sleep. Whether it was owing to feverishness caused by his exertion or no, his brain was not at rest and he dreamed. Some of the principal incidents and trivialities which mark with so deep an impression, and ineffaceably stamp man's brain in his passage through life, passed in lucid review before him. Those who have well-nigh run their course, who have ascended the hill, and have, but not without many looks backward, reached the foot, and yet hover for a time as it were upon the brink of death, can bear witness how small and unim-

portant episodes stand out clearly, side by side with the graver and more weighty, as though they had occurred but yesterday. To a finely constructed and nervously sensitive brain such as Gerard's the agonizing moments he had endured had proved too great a strain upon the system, and the suffering had affected him mentally as well as bodily. He turned uneasily on his couch, his cheeks were flushed, and incoherent sentences and mutterings disturbed his slumbers, whilst wild fancies crowded upon his over-heated imagination, but it was only for a brief period. Youth, and his naturally robust constitution, carried all before it. The fevered pulse abated, and gradually became calm, full, and regular in its beat. Still he dreamt. He was back in his merry boyish days, and under the wide-spreading, thick-leaved oaks at Clifford's Wood. Again he galloped his pony with madcap glee, heedless of danger, under the arching forest trees. How vividly he remembered that pony! a birthday gift from his father; dark strawberry roan in colour, with

small Arab head, deep of girth, and with flat, firm legs, that reminded him in beauty of shape and muscular power, of the gallant royal that burst from his covert amongst the bracken, and with mighty antlers reared on high, fled at his noisy approach and scoured away into the blue distance in search of some more secluded thicket. It all seemed so real and present with him, that bygone time, so happy, so free from alloy or anxiety, sunny hours of cloudless brightness. Is it not ever so on glancing backwards? We are but mortals, and as such our motto often seems to be *discontent*. We grope in the dark for the unreal. We sigh for that we have not, and when we have overtaken and possessed ourselves of those sweets of existence we have hankered after with all the passion of our nature, all the perseverance and powers of our intellect united, how frequently do we turn with disgust and loathing from the idol we have set up?—perhaps seek with memory's aid to hark back to those things lost to us for ever, and

then, when the hopelessness of that too becomes apparent, we hasten on afresh in wildest chase of some newly constructed chimera, all and each to vanish from us into thin air. What child has not wished himself a youth? What youth has not longed to put off schoolboy days, and expand into the fuller ripeness of the man? What man has not sighed for another estate, a long remove from his own? So flows life's tide. Gerard, his mind wandering at random, heard distinctly as in life his father's hearty laugh, as he rushed his pony at the big sunk fence, cleared it with a flying leap, and landed at his side on the smooth-shaven turf. Then he remembered whole hours spent in the gun room, down at the rabbit warren, or in the rookery. But all things have an ending and Gerard's slumbers, as it happened, were fated to be rudely disturbed. The tall, red cliffs of Sidcombe, the stretch of golden sands were before him, and he, with pretty Lilian Fabyn's dimpled hand in his, was exploring the mysteries of the Shark's Tooth reef. He heard

her childish bursts of mirth, as with bare, dainty limbs she stepped into the limpid pools of water the tide had left behind, and with a tiny net in hand chased to and fro the darting prawns, and then her lovely face, as he had seen it last, seemed bending over him. Her hands were clasped in prayer, her hazel eyes were filled with tears, her face was pale as marble, and every line, every feature of it spoke to him of unutterable sadness. The waving masses of her hair floated about her shoulders, snowy in whiteness. He thought that her lips moved in supplication for him, but it was of no avail. He felt himself dragged by some invisible strength further and further away; he was powerless to resist. She disappeared for an instant, and all around was chaos, and then he saw her form again, a bright light shedding its rays upon her. She stood on the brink of an awful precipice and between them yawned a gulf of bottomless, immeasurable profundity. At that instant a crash rang in his ears, as though every bolt and rivet in the ship were

started. He was awake; he felt her tremble from stem to stern. Another and lesser sound followed, as of some heavy body rebounding from the massive iron beams. Quick as thought he sprang from his bed and huddled on his clothes with nervous fingers. How long he had slept he could not tell, but he felt no sense of weakness as he rushed on deck, and found himself enveloped in darkness. The wind whistled and howled through the rigging, and great drops of rain splashed in his face. One of those sudden and incomprehensible atmospheric changes to be met with in warm latitudes had taken place, and the air was keen and chilled him to the bone. His eyesight was becoming accustomed to the gloom, and he could distinguish the forms of the passengers flocking up the hatchway and crowding the decks.

"What is it? What has happened?" Gerard called out, and some one near at hand, whose face he could not discern, replied:

"Guess it's a collision, boss, and the old barky won't float long, they're saying, but I

don't believe it. This ship's just built in a pile of water-tight compartments, and old Davis is on the bridge as cool as a knife, and I guess he's a square man that'll see us safe out of it, so don't you get flurried. Where's Mrs. Devereaux?" Gerard recognized the voice of the American who had interrupted him just as he was confiding to Ada Devereaux's ears "the old, old story," and he had not seen her since. Ah, where was she? He never paused to answer that question, but turned and made his way down below in search of her, and almost caught her in his arms as he hastily rounded a sharp angle in the passage that led to her berth.

"Thank God, I have found you."

"Why, what——"

"Oh, nothing has happened. At least, nothing more than can be overcome by skill and care."

"Ah, there is more than that. I can see it in your face."

"No, believe me. Some bluff-bowed German, making more lee than head way, has

contrived to run foul of us, that is all," and Gerard, as he spoke, tried to force a laugh, but the attempt was a melancholy failure. Ada Devereaux had learned to read his face, and knew how to construe every change of expression. She had told herself that to bend this man, and to shape his will like plastic clay to her wishes, she must *know him*, she must understand his character, and as he stood before her now, slightly pale, but to all other appearances calm, she saw in his eyes, and in the firm lines of his mouth, something which filled her with fear.

"You try to laugh, but it is useless. You cannot deceive me."

"Believe me, nothing is further from my thoughts."

"Then let me go up on deck. Those shouts! Ah, let me pass! Even now we may be sinking." With her long, slender fingers she clutched his arm, and strove to pass.

"No! hear me, Mrs. Devereaux. Ada——"

"What! listen to the ravings of a love-sick

boy while the ship is going down! Choose some more fitting time and place, Mr. Clarencourt, and let me go."

"Pardon me; you mistook my meaning. If I did forget myself so much as to address you by your Christian name, forgive me. I meant but to warn you that to lose your nerve is fatal. Keep calm, and suffer me to lead you to your cabin. I will return from the deck with news which will set your fears at rest in an instant." The dull, heavy thud of feet sounded along the passage, and Gerard, as he was about to ascend the companion ladder, heard his own name spoken.

"Mr. Clarencourt, sir, is that you at last? I've been searching for you high and low. See here. Come this way and bring the lady quick, but for God's sake don't alarm her, for that'll be making bad worse. There's not an instant to be lost. The old 'Simoom's' got her death-blow, and is sinking fast by the head."

"Then, what is to be done? The boats——"

"There won't one of 'em live, the way that they're goin' on, quarrellin' and fightin'; but me and my mates has got hold o' one. See here, sir! You saved my life this blessed mornin', and I mean to do the like by you. Bring up the lady; sharp's the word, sir, if we mean to get clear." In less time than it takes to relate, Gerard Clarencourt had contrived to pilot the way up the companion ladder with Mrs. Devereaux clinging tightly to his arm. Together they stood on the slippery deck, with the wind howling over head, and moaning through the rigging. Great angry waves lashed the ship's sides, as if eager to claim her as their own. Passengers, seamen of every nationality, dark scowling lascars, jostled and cursed at each other in their mad efforts to get to the boats. Death confronted them both; yet even in that wild moment, when the grave yawned so near, and a score of terrible dangers confronted him, Gerard Clarencourt thought not of himself. Those words of hers, when she had jeered and

taunted him as a love-sick boy, rang in his ears. Better anything than harsh language from her lips, and yet how he loved her! How he would have given his life, at that instant, that she might be safe—shed his blood drop by drop, that she might go free and unscathed!—and as he bent over her, and lent his strength to keep at bay the panic-stricken crowd, that the fair, soft form of this woman he loved so well might not suffer an indignity or an injury, there came into his face a grand and noble expression, and his eyes beamed with a soft light, good to look upon. Had she seen that gentle tenderness, passionate homage, and unselfish anxiety for *her* personal safety which was impressed upon his features, it is possible that the worldly heart of Ada Devereaux had been touched with pity, if nothing more, and the distrust, the contempt, and the bitterness which slumbered in the inmost recesses of her heart towards his sex had given place to a more kindly feeling, and her ambition once renounced, she might

have relented, and abandoned the course she had marked out for herself—have let this man pass and escape her toils, because of his goodness. But it was not to be. Such thoughts seemed to have vanished with her girlhood, and left her nature hardened and unimpressionable. Always doubting, serving nothing, caring for nothing which failed to pander to her vanity, and satisfy that insatiable appetite which had grown into an all-absorbing lust of self. Bare-headed, with the salt spray dashing in his face, and with scarce covering to his body —for he had thrown his coat about her, that her delicate shoulders should be exposed as little as possible to the roughness of the elements—Gerard grasped an oar, and pulled with might and main, cheering on the men as, with set teeth and heavy breathing, they tugged and laboured with all their strength to keep the boat's head to those great, cruel masses of rolling billows. They had stayed by the ship as long as they dared, until fear for their own safety had caused

them to shove off, to escape the mass of struggling wretches who strove frantically to leap on board. It was all the work of an instant. They could take no more, and it was then that they had let go their hold with the boat-hooks, and drifted to leeward, followed by a storm of piteous cries for mercy and assistance, and bitter imprecations wrung from the lips of men who felt the cold hand of death well-nigh rest upon them,and knew that their last chance of life had passed from beyond their reach. The horrible enormities of which they had been guilty during the long years of their worse than useless existence crowded like countless ghostly fiends upon their hearts, which had ever looked unpityingly upon the miseries of their fellow-creatures. When had they done aught that was good? When had they failed to turn away with disgust and loathing from rags and poverty? When had their hands wandered into the depths of their pockets to alleviate hunger and thirst? When had they ever spared a

woman's weakness? Never. And they knew it, and shrieked aloud in their cowardly agony. A few there were who, having done all that was in their power to aid themselves, but having found their attempts useless, stood on the sea-washed decks, or clung to the rigging, calm and composed, as though the water were blue and sparkling, the sun shining in gorgeous radiance overhead, and all around bright with the laughing hours which stretched before them in peace and plenty. And these men waved their hands, and shouted a faint, hoarse farewell to the last boat-load of their tempest-tossed comrades. Firm lips met tightly, strong teeth were clenched, and broad brows knitted in despair; while the hot, salt tears dimmed the sight as thoughts of well-loved women and chubby little ones into whose eyes they felt they never more would gaze, whose rosy lips they loved to kiss so well, and yet would never touch again in life. "Oh, God! it is hard to die like this," was moaned aloud by one of

pallid countenance and bent figure. He had spent long years in a deadly climate, where his darlings could not be. Years of toil and oftentimes of sickness. But the pay was good, and at home, in the old country, none would employ him. It had been his duty and he had accepted it and lived his life, and carried his heavy burden nobly. He had prospered, and amassed wealth enough to enable him to give his girl-bride (for as such he remembered her) and her soft-faced children a home such as he had pictured to himself and written of in many a cheery letter. A home which was to be an earthly paradise, white-walled and vine-clad, where the luscious fruits would grow ripe and sweet as the lips of the woman he loved better than his life, and had toiled for with the sweat of his brow. Ah! well, it was over now. She would expect him, but he would never come. The great black waves would close above his head, and he would be snatched from the arms whose touch he seemed to feel clinging about his neck as he had felt them last. And the great

round beads of agony covered his forehead, and he sank on his knees in silent prayer, while the huge ship rolled on through the night, and buried her head deeper and deeper into the heaving mass of waters and shook and trembled as the rough waves beat against her in all their majesty. In the boat, as the darkness of the dawn came upon them, and with it a lull in the storm, Gerard had relinquished his oar and crept close to Ada Devereaux's side, with intent to arrange the wraps which he had thrown about her. No words of thanks escaped her lips. She was oblivious of all save herself and her own danger. She only cowered with chattering teeth and shivering form, and hair all dank and moistened with the salt spray, down in her corner near the stern, where the men had thrown some coarse tarpaulin, and Gerard had drawn it about her dainty limbs to shield her from the elements. He never left her side, but sat and watched, eager to catch a word that should fall from her lips. None came, for she slept at length from sheer weariness and

exhaustion, and he, content to be near her, looked into her face with love in his heart and pity in his eyes, that she so tenderly nurtured should be suffering in an open boat, exposed to the cold blasts of the night, and with her life endangered. He was young—a mere boy in years—and he loved her. The dawn broke and the fair yellow light of another day burst forth and shed its cheering beams upon the crested breakers which gleamed like molten gold. The brave old "Simoom," that had weathered many a storm, and cleft with her sharp iron keel many a league of ocean, was nowhere to be seen when Gerard glanced around him with the first streaks of dawn. She had sunk with all her living freight of hopes and fears.

CHAPTER III.

MINE FOR HIS.

Over the sea, hundreds of leagues away, the glorious golden light of God's day broke forth in all the mellow radiance of an English autumn morn. The same sun, but with the time and place how widely altered! The limitless expanse of moving water, whose waves beat upon the solitary object resting on its bosom, and broke every now and then in a light shower of spray over the gunwale of the boat which held the weary, anxious, and hollow-eyed group of castaways, was left behind, and, in place of it all, the waving tops of the forests of beech and oak which surrounded the vast estates owned by Lord Goddington, were tinged with amber light. And under its cheering influence the rabbits crept from their burrows for a nibble at the

crisp, sweet shoots of the tender grass which glistened with a weight of dew. Cunning old dog foxes sought the nearest hen-roosts in quest of chickens which, in spite of the defiant clarion of bold chanticleer, were at their mercy. Rings of pale blue smoke curled upward from the chimneys of thatched cottages and farms half buried in rich tinted foliage. Ruddy-cheeked, brown-limbed peasant children, fresh from the sweet innocent sleep of childhood, opened the rickety wooden casements half hidden under the eaves and drank in new life with the balmy autumn air, laden with the delicate scent of flowers, and pregnant with the odour of the autumn woods. Great rough-visaged, powerfully built yokels, hard-worked and horny handed with years of labour, issued from the doors and sought their daily work with a soft whistle of contentment and a wave of their hands to their chubby-faced offspring. The day had begun, and full of health and strength, rendered joyous with those twin blessings, their happi-

ness found vent and re-echoed in the misty morning air. Fat ears of golden corn, ripe and ready for the sickle, rustled in the wind, and bright scarlet poppies showed their gaudy petals midst the waving stems. It was only an English rural scene, such as may be found in any of our midland counties, but it spoke of peace and plenty. No hurrying bands of beardless youths, torn from the arms of mothers and of those they loved, and compelled by the stern finger of the law to fight for their country's good, trod the dusty highway. The tramp of armed squadrons, the sharp rattle of musketry, and the roar of cannon were not there. But instead was heard the sighing of the wind through the russet-hued beechen boughs, and the gurgle of the stream as it rippled over stones and moss-grown boulders, on its way down to the sea; the lowing of well-fed herds of kine, and the rumble of heavy-wheeled waggons, groaning under the weight of well-grown corn. Everything whispered of industry and contentment, toil and plenty.

On the slope of the hill, not a rifle shot from where the waves lashed and chafed on the reef at Sidcombe, rose the turrets and gables of The Towers, Lilian Fabyn's home. The light of the breaking dawn struggled through the openings on either side of the rose-tinted blinds which veiled the chamber window set apart for the repose of Sir George Fabyn's well-loved and only child, and what was more in the eyes of the world in general—his heiress. Lilian was slumbering sweetly and with a healthful soundness, known only to those whose contact with mankind has been brief, or who have floated down the current of life's stream preserved in innocence by the loftiness of their nature and God's grace. Her full red lips were parted, showing rows of even teeth, her bosom rose and fell in deep, regular breathing, and though her face was turned away from the window, a smile as of happiness and pleasing dreams was upon it. One rounded arm was raised partly above her head, and from it the

draperies had fallen, revealing its shapeliness. The other was partially concealed by the pillows on which her head reclined, and between the fingers of that hand she held a letter. It contained the last lines written by Gerard Clarencourt before leaving India.

"How stupid of me!" she muttered with her waking thoughts, "and I don't believe in dreams one bit; and yet he seemed in danger and I unable to reach or aid him. It was all so indistinct, but the end of it was happy, for we were together, and he smiled as though he loved and cared for me. Ah! well, nurse used to say that dreams 'ran contrary,' so there is no comfort to be derived from that thought. I have only this to cheer me until he comes," she added, as she pressed the letter to her lips and then arose and proceeded slowly with her toilet. Full an hour had elapsed, and the bell had sounded once for breakfast, ere Lilian, looking fresh rosy, and daintily attired in the whitest of morning gowns, and without a vestige of

colour save the delicate, peach-like bloom which mantled on her cheeks, descended the oaken staircase and entered the morning room. The apartment, which was situated in the older portion of the building, was as yet untenanted, unless mention be made of a favourite pointer belonging to Sir George, which reclined full length on the hearthrug, and lazily signified its pleasure at sight of Lilian by a yawn and a wag of its tail. Lady Fabyn was fond of canaries, so a gaily-painted cage which hung suspended from the ceiling near the open window contained a carolling songster. The room was furnished cheerfully in the modern style; the wall-paper, which was of a sea-green hue, was broken up by a few choice paintings by well-known artists. A china breakfast service was on the table, some tempting viands, a pile of letters, and a copy of the *Times*. Lilian tossed the two or three *billets-doux* which were inscribed with her name aside without breaking the seals, and took up the paper. It was a habit she had adopted of late, ever since the news had

reached her of Gerard Clarencourt's intention to return home. She believed him to be on the high seas, and so for her the shipping intelligence possessed an all-absorbing interest. She turned over the pages until she had found the column she sought. Searchingly her eyes wandered over the densely packed lines. What was it that caused her cheek to blanch white as marble, and her lips to become bloodless? A separate article had attracted her attention, headed—"Loss of an English Mail Steamer." It was laconic, and to the effect that a ship, supposed to be the "Simoom," had collided with another vessel on her passage to England—exact locality not known—and had sunk with (it was supposed) all hands on board.

"The 'Simoom'! His ship gone down! Oh, God! can it be true? Then, *where is he?*" she exclaimed, in a voice low and choked with emotion. She was bewildered; she *could* not credit it, could not bring herself to believe in this thing that had come upon her with such cruel force. Her brain seemed

numbed, and lacked the power to realize the magnitude of a blow that had been dealt her with no warning of its advent. A low hysterical laugh broke from her lips. Her slight girlish figure swayed as though quivering from the effects of some terrible inward struggle; her little hands grasped the fatal paper, and the delicate filbert-shaped nails punctured it in many places with a spasmodic strength born of mental agony.

"Gerard dead! Oh, no, no! It cannot be! God could not be so cruel. Dead, and I here, spared to see his death recorded. Why did He not take my life first?" A moan of inward misery rent the air, so startling and appalling in its anguish that the pointer, half asleep before the empty fireplace, sprang to his feet and whined and fawned about her. The shrill warble of the canary was changed to a low twitter, and it tapped its perch as if at a loss to understand the interruption. Then a dead silence ensued, and in the midst of it, as though afraid that her grief might be discovered, Lilian passed

through the long French window and tottered down the flight of marble steps out into the sunlight.

CHAPTER IV.

NEWS.

As the shades of night deepened, and the birds twittered a last chorus of remarks to each other before going to roost, Mrs. Clarencourt stood alone on the terrace at Clifford's Wood. With her it was a favourite promenade. She could remember having paced along the broad gravel walk in the years that were past, a young and beautiful bride. She could call to remembrance having leant over that same balustrade with feelings of envy and jealousy in her heart. Envy that the well-tended lawns and undulating expanse of park and woodland, which bathed in blue mist stretched around on every side, were not hers. Not one single acre was her own and she had sold herself to buy it. Once she had believed that to be mistress of this wealth would be sufficient. She had wo-

fully underrated the greed that lay dormant within her. She had married a man that she did not love to acquire, as she believed, riches. Did he but die, the chains which fettered and held her prisoner in a bondage she loathed would be broken. The gold which she coveted (or most of it) would be her very own. None could dictate, none could hold the purse-strings, there would be no one to watch or control her actions. Well, she had her way in part. He had died loving and (to some extent) believing in her to the last, as a woman who was worthy of all the benefits that he had conferred upon her, but she had failed to cheat him into the belief that he had won her heart. And so he passed away, but with his fleeting strength had robbed her of the prize for which, with the miserable avarice of a miser, she had bartered her life to possess. She was thinking—thinking—and her thoughts were of her son. Strange too that she should bestow her moments of reflection upon him—odd in the extreme, since she generally contrived to

dismiss him from her mind as much as was in her power, and unless his wants or presence were thrust upon her notice, her efforts to trouble herself little about him were eminently successful. Before Mr. Clarencourt's death she had not been actually unkind to her son; she had simply been too much absorbed by the inroad made upon her time by society and its dictates. She loved the fashionable world, and had plunged into its vortex with unparalleled selfishness. She found no moments to waste upon her son—*his child*, as she would whisper to herself when trying to still the small voice of her good angel and stifle her qualms of conscience. Since her husband's decease she looked upon Gerard very much in the light of an usurper, who would some day, at least when he chose to marry, oust her of the very home she had learned to consider as her own. It was an offence she could never forgive. She detested the dead for having dared to execute so unjust a deed (as she was pleased to deem her husband's last wishes), but yet more was

she disposed to resent the injury done her in the person of her living son. Yet by the world—by those who knew nothing of her nature, and who probably cared less—she was voted everything that was clever, agreeable, and charming, for she could (if it suited her purpose) be all three at the same time.

"I suppose he will be here again in a few days," she soliloquized half aloud, as she pursued her train of thoughts. "Bigger and browner, and more like living than ever. I may expect him to bring some barmaid or ballet-girl (who knows?) when he is of age and introduce her as his wife, as a polite hint for me to retire and leave him in undisturbed possession of the estate. What a farce it all is! Yet I must keep it up, and talk of him to poor, simple-minded Lady Goddington and others as my dear son, for whose return I count the hours. It is droll, but unpleasantly true that he is my—no, *his* child. A great, overgrown lad, who will one day rob me of these fair lands, and who (go where I will) makes me look ten times older than I should

appear had he never been born. I had half hoped (very wicked of me, no doubt, but true, nevertheless) that he would sicken of jungle fever or something deadly, and rid me of——"

"Mrs. Clarencourt."

She had failed to hear the step or notice the approach of the tall, slight figure of a girl who had drawn near her in the dusk.

"Good gracious! how you startled me, Miss Fabyn. Is anything amiss?"

"No, at least——" answered Lilian softly as she strove with a great effort to control her feelings.

"What do you mean? There *must* be something wrong when you come here so late and alone."

"Then you know nothing?"

"Nothing of what, my dear girl? My curiosity is awakened, so do please cease to talk in riddles." For a few moments there was a dead silence between the two women. Lilian could feel Mrs. Clarencourt's gaze fixed upon her. She dreaded that she might betray

her own feelings. At length she spoke, and her voice was without a quiver.

"Mrs. Clarencourt, do please be prepared for the worst! It may be only a false report. But the ship in which your son sailed from India is said to have foundered."

"*Gerard drowned!*" were the two words that issued from Mrs. Clarencourt's lips, and although thrown off her guard to some extent, she contrived to introduce a suitable wail of misery into her voice.

"Here is the paper in which this fearful news is reported. May God help you to bear this trial."

"Leave me, child, leave me; it is too sudden, too awful." The answer was scarce heard by Lilian; she could trust herself no longer, she would surely break down, and then her love would be a secret no more. She turned and passed on into the night, alone with God and her first great sorrow.

CHAPTER V.

A SAIL IN THE MOONLIGHT.

To recount systematically all the hardships, escapes, and sufferings endured by Gerard, the woman he loved, and those with them, would be to follow in a well-worn track marked out by the pens of prominent authors, and it could scarce fail to be a mere repetition of facts which have been so often and ably recorded. Days of seemingly endless length succeeded each other.

Eight suns had risen and poured the fury of their eastern might upon the scorched and blistered backs of the shipwrecked boat's crew; suns which, when they had gained the meridian, shone with the fierce heat of a furnace, making the brain reel in the first throbs of madness, and the fevered pulse beat as though it would never again return to its normal condition.

Then drenching night dews and chilling blasts swept over them as though they, of all God's creatures the most miserable, were doomed by an invincible power to a lingering death of starvation and thirst. Piteous appeals for mercy, softly whispered prayers, into which were thrown all the agony of the dying; loud imprecations, quarrelings, and the sounds of strife had broken in turn the solemn stillness of the great vault of infinite space which reared its wondrous canopy above their heads. And now at length, on that eighth night, the angel of death had hovered over them, and touched with chill finger two hearts, for whom the sun of the morrow would never rise. The horrible mutterings of delirium, too, were not wanting. Strong bearded men, thin and emaciated by weakness, sobbed in their agony as the salt tears coursed down the wrinkled furrows of their worn cheeks. In the fore part of the boat were huddled a wretched group of parched and starving men; the wolfish light that gleams in the eyes of the murderer and the madman

shone in their sunken orbs, and with excited gesture, mixed with many a blasphemous oath, they conversed together. In the stern sat, or rather lay, Ada Devereaux, for she reclined full length on a boat's sail which Gerard had spread for her. Her face was pale, and dark purple circles extended beneath her eyes—those turquoise-blue eyes into which Gerard loved so well to gaze, and in whose depths he fancied womanliness and candour beamed. They were bloodshot and yellow as those of a drunkard now. Near her, almost at her feet, was Gerard with sunken cheek and blanched face; his forehead, damped with the perspiration of despair, was almost hidden beneath the sea-wet masses of his hair, and he bent his head from time to time to gaze upon the features of a form which he supported in his arms. It was that of the man whose life he had saved, and who in his turn had rescued him from the sinking ship. Slowly, wearily, and with the expression that might linger in the eyes of a dying stag, wistful and pitiful to behold, the man looked

upward at Gerard. His parched tongue rolled in his mouth, powerless at first to frame a word, and then, when the sound came, it was only the oft-repeated cry for water. In reply Gerard stretched out his hand and poured out a few drops of the precious liquid.

"Take it, Tom," he said gently, as he placed the tin pannikin to the lips of the dying man, who swallowed the water greedily. The draught seemed to bring with it new life, and he reared himself bolt upright into a sitting posture.

"God bless you, sir! But what have I done? the last few drains of that blessed liquor you've given to me."

"No! not the last of it, Tom."

"But them greedy wolves, there for'ard, as would snatch the last drain from a woman, 'll soon rob you of it the moment I'm done for."

Gerard glanced wearily at the group of men, and then with the light of a great love at Ada Devereaux.

"Never fear, Tom, old fellow! I'll look after her. Not one drop of water shall they get unless I give it them. They must polish me off first."

"There's two or three of 'em what's stronger than you. I'm goin' where my old woman's gone, sir, and I don't much care. But if I could have lived just to see you and the lady safe and happy, why I should have slipped my cable content. And I should have done so (leastways I should have lived as long, if not longer, than some of 'em, cause I'm tough). But that dig in the ribs with the oar fair did for me. I've done my best any way, sir, haven't I?"

"Yes! Yes! Would to God there were more honest hearts like yours in this hard world to make it a brighter one," answered Gerard, as the tears stood in his dark eyes.

"And I've never robbed no man, as I knows of, and best of all, I believes every word of my old mother's book, as she taught me when I was a boy not as tall as a marlin'

spike. Now don't you take on, sir, but cheer up the lady and keep a sharp look-out on them brutes as I used to think were pals worth dyin' for. Pals they *was*, and afore I knowed 'em as well as I do now, the last bit o' biscuit, tot o' whiskey, or half o' the remainin' dollar left to me I would have split with 'em, but I'm blowed if I think I can forgive 'em for wantin' to snatch the sup and bite from a woman, and her life dependin' on't, though I'm steerin' dead straight, and with every stitch o' sail I can stagger under, right away for Davy Jones' locker."

"Hush, you mustn't talk in that way. You must pity them. Poor fellows! They're starving, and no longer under their own control."

"Pity 'em! why see here, sir, I do, that's straight. But as mess-mates I'd hoped for better things from 'em. Mr. Clarencourt, sir! you won't think me wantin' in respect if I asks you a question."

"Not a bit; what is it?

"Well, sir, the lady there ——"

"What of her?"

"Some kind o' craft'll sheer alongside and pick you up, I knows it, though I'll not live to see her myself, but she'll come, sure as my name's Tom Hockaty. You'll have saved her life. Now, see here, sir, you knows the old sayin' about lookers-on seein' most o' the game. You'll just be for gettin' spliced as soon as you gets ashore. Don't interrupt me, sir, for I'm gettin' terribly dry in the throat, and my brain seems all a-fire like. Now I haven't been aboard o' the same boat all these days without noticin' her. At a time like this, sir, when I just feels I'm dyin' by inches, I wouldn't say a word against no person. But take my word for it. When you gets ashore, if so be as you have the luck, just you give her a wide berth, and you'll live to thank me for sayin' it. She ain't worthy of you, sir, and a terrible lot o' leeway you'll be makin' if you drifts through life with the likes o' her. No offence, I hope, sir?"

For an instant the hot angry flush of passion and annoyance rushed into Gerard's

cheeks, so haggard and wan; but the next moment it had fled and left him calm and colourless as before.

"Never mind, Tom. You mean it well."

"I do, sir, and I've done all as I knows for you and her."

There was a long pause between the two, broken only by the sounds of angry altercation, groans, and oaths from the men for'ard, the monotonous splash of the waves, mingled with the long-drawn, irregular, and laboured breathing of the sufferer, who had fallen back exhausted into Gerard's arms. It was the weakness preceding death. The boat rose and fell on the long glassy swell, and the waves babbled and murmured under the heaving keel. Away to the westward the rosy hue of the sunset had faded into palest aquamarine, which deepened into darkest blue towards the zenith. The shades of night descended with the rapidity of an eastern clime, and one by one the stars shone forth, increasing in brilliance and magnitude as the last vestiges of daylight

departed, until the whole heavens seemed ablaze with glittering constellations. Still the one dark object, which alone was tenanted with life, floated on with the current, and Gerard kept his solitary watch by the side of the dying. He almost forgot the existence of those around him as his hand sought to discover some fluttering throb of the weakening pulse, and his heart was filled with anguish as he looked upon the pallid countenance, and felt, as the body hung limp and heavy in his arms, that he was in the presence of the dead. Why had this come upon him? Was it not enough to feel that, inch by inch, he too was drawing nearer to the shadowy unknown land? Was it not bitterness enough to know that with each fleeting hour the strength of the being he loved best on earth was slowly, but surely, ebbing, and that the chance of saving her from a lingering death was as steadily diminishing? And yet this man, gallant and true of heart, upon whose knowledge as a seaman he had depended to aid him to escape from the dangers which sur-

rounded him, was rudely snatched away beyond recall. It was the death-blow to his hopes, and as he bent over the stricken form, and gazed upon the rigid features which he had only known for so short a space, yet learnt to love, for their manliness, honesty, and devotion to himself, he felt the significance of his position. Alone with the woman he loved, yet too weak to protect her from the rough clutch of those who sought to rob her of the last draught of water, and the few remaining morsels of food. By the side of the corpse he knelt, and his parched and bloodless lips murmured in fervent repetition the simple prayers he had lisped in childhood. How long he remained thus prostrate and wrestling with the thoughts of his inmost heart he never knew, but he was suddenly rendered conscious of the dangers that beset him by the whiz of some heavy substance, which grazed his ear, to bury itself in the sea with a splash. In an instant he had sprung to his feet, and though his trembling limbs, weak from exposure and want, almost refused

to support him, he hissed forth from between his clenched teeth one word:

"Cowards!"

"We're none of that! It don't run in our blood, leastways not in mine. There are four of us here for'ard starving and mad for drink, and all along of that silk and satin creature, as I suppose you're sweet on."

"Silence!"

"Silence be d——d! This here ain't no time for words. If me and my mates hadn't seen for ourselves that you was a plucky young chap, and not one of them soft-mouthed liars, that says a lot and means nothing, we wouldn't have stood it so long. But it was more for the sake of Tom there as lies dead as we've looked on and seen you a-pour-in' the food and drink down *her* throat when it ought to have been share and share alike."

"God help me! have I not suffered myself? Have I touched aught that should have been yours? Am I not dying like you? The food which remains, if divided

amongst us, would not prolong our lives by one hour. Spare her! pity her! she is a woman."

Gerard's figure towered in the stern of the boat. At his feet, stark and lifeless, lay the sailor, and behind him cowered Ada Devereaux, roused from her half-fainting lethargy by the sound of rough voices and rude oaths. Her mind was wandering, and her eyes gleamed with fever and delirium, as she strove with trembling fingers to toss back from off her face the tangled tresses of her hair. In the bows rose the lean, gaunt, almost spectral form of the spokesman, while about him were clustered those for whom he pleaded.

"Spare her, pity her, she is a woman!" again Gerard's words rang out upon the still night air, and his voice trembled with emotion as his parched lips framed the sentences for her sake. That piteous appeal, terse, yet filled with a volume of meaning, and betraying so irrevocably that his heart's desire found vent in those words. The

answer to them hurled away his last chance, and flung back in his teeth his request, refused and scoffed at.

"Sparin' her won't go far towards savin' us, and pityin's out of the question! As for a woman, why they ain't no better than men, nor as good. So that trash is best stowed."

"Is that your final decision?"

"Yes, that's the mind of all of us. We mean to get the grub, and if you won't give it up by fair means, why we'll just take it by foul!"

"So be it! Then look to yourselves. The first man who moves I will stretch out dead where he stands. You know me! Choose as you think fit!"

Gerard drew a revolver from the breast-pocket of his coat, and levelled it point blank. In the hurry of his departure from the "Simoom" he had slipped it in his pocket almost mechanically, but every chamber of it was as empty, as when it left the manufacturer's hands, for in his haste he had forgotten the cartridges. He knew it, but his hand never

trembled as he ran his eye along the short steel barrel of the Colt. For a moment the *ruse* seemed likely to prove effectual. The man wavered in his purpose, but it was for no longer time than is necessary to relate the circumstance. With a hoarse laugh, he sprang over the thwarts.

"Come on, mates," he shouted, "he can't shoot us all, and may be the powder's damp."

With the uplifted Colt in his hand, Gerard stood, and flung it full in the face of his first assailant. He was about to close with the second when a moving object caught his eye. "A ship, a ship! Back! every one of you. We are saved." The pallid fever-stricken faces turned as if by magic. Their hands fell to their sides, and their eyes wandered in quest of the object to which he pointed. In the broad silver track, where the rays of the moon shone brightest, and clearly limned against the glistening light, rose the dark black hull and rigging of a vessel. And Gerard, as his second glance told him that his eyes or over-heated brain

had not played him false, sank down by Ada Devereaux's side and cried in his joy: "Thank God, my darling! you are saved at last."

CHAPTER VI.

THE "MONTEZUMA."

"A Yankee ship came down the river."

THE words so familiar to seafaring ears were bawled out at the pitch of a lusty voice, and the man who sang them paused in his work to glance along the well-caulked and holy-stoned deck of the clipper trader "Montezuma." The day was warm enough to cause the tar to bubble in the seams between the oaken planks. A faint breeze ruffled the surface of the water and filled the huge sheets of canvas with fitful breath. The reef points pattered, and the blocks and cordage creaked with their weight of spars, as slowly and majestically the merchantman ploughed her course.

"Stow that, Bill. I'll warrant me you

weren't singin' when you was on the look-out last night."

"Why?"

"'Cause if you had been, it's more than likely that the lady and the rest of 'em would have been safe and sound in Davy Jones' locker."

"Wrong, mate. I sings when I don't know it, and singin' don't interfere with seein'."

The two men were sitting on the main hatch, engaged in repairing certain rents and patches in a great heap of sails which lay strewn around them.

"No, singin' don't interfere with seein', as ever I heard," repeated the man; "yet but for the light as the young chap kindled, there's not a man aboard of this ship, or any other, as could have made 'em out. And it was just the best piece o' luck as ever happened to him, them two or three matches as he found stowed away in the corner of his waistcoat pocket!"

It was all perfectly true. When the welcome vision of the distant ship, moving like a

pulseless phantom through the gloom, dawned upon Gerard's weakening sight, for some minutes he and those with him gave themselves up to the loudest and wildest expressions of their joy. They cried and shrieked in their happy delirium, and shook hands with each other, forgetful that a few moments before they had contemplated murder! It was all forgotten now, and at length they were saved. No such thought ever occurred to them that the vessel they had sighted could fail to discover them, or leave them to their horrible fate, until the terrible truth flashed like lightning through their minds that she *drew no nearer*. In their agony they shouted aloud and waved their arms and the oars, with their clothes lashed to the blades. *Cui bono?* with the dusky shadows of the night around them, and the fitful moonbeams' transitory glare their only light, as the rapid currents of air floated in white, wool-like masses of vapour across its disc, consigning them to darkness. How should they be seen? How should they hope for deliverance? And then,

with the awful feeling that death with sure and stealthy strides was again closing in upon them, they had turned to the man whose life they had sought to take — turned with the reverence and awe that the school child feels for the master. The rudest savage recognizes ability and culture. He does not under-estimate that which he does not possess. Gerard had risen from Ada Devereaux's side, where in his joy he had sunk, forgetful of all else but her, and in him, whose life they had sought to take, by the merest chance they had found their saviour. It is ever so. The straw breaks the camel's back, the single drop in the goblet causes it to overflow, the deviation of a hair's-breadth, the quiver of a muscle, causes the bullet to penetrate the vital spot or fall wide of the mark. Had they carried out their fell intention and flung his body into the depths as food for the fish, those two or three matches, of the bare existence of which they had no idea, would have been lost, and the blaze, which like the lighthouse beacon, pilots the struggling mariner to a place of

safety, would never have been kindled. But it was to be. With fingers that trembled from excitement and with the strength and energy born of despair, they had torn up the gratings and thwarts, breaking them up into fragments small enough to ignite with the feeble means left to them. The night had been still, without a breath of air to lessen their chance of kindling a flame. The plan had met with success, and before an hour had passed they had been conveyed in safety to the "Montezuma." The raised poop of the vessel was covered with an awning, and under it, protected from the glaring sunlight, lay Ada Devereaux. She reclined full length, her head propped up by pillows, and a book, that in her weariness and inability to read she had dropped from her hand, fluttered its neglected pages in the light and fitful gusts of air. Her face still bore traces of the suffering she had endured, though the few days that had passed in quiet and plenty since her deliverance had done much to restore her strength. Close to

her and leaning over the taffrail was Gerard Clarencourt. His mind was filled with varied and conflicting thoughts. Just then, as he gazed into the limpid depths of the water which swirled and eddied in miniature whirlpools under the vessel's counter, he was thinking of Wilson. Through the well-nigh interminable length of those days of suffering, while carried here and driven there by winds and currents, exposed to the burning rays of the Indian sun by day, and to the baneful light and chilly dews of night, when he had been forced to look upon the woman he loved, as hour by hour her strength diminished, and to feel hope almost vanish whilst he beheld her woe and knew his own power to be ebbing fast, what wonder that he had forgotten to remember the existence of his old and faithful servant? But since he had set foot on the deck of the "Montezuma," and the immediate anxiety caused by Ada Devereaux's danger had been removed, he had had time for reflection; and in his inmost heart he had mourned the loss of the only link which had

bound him to his home in far-away Devon. He grieved with all the warmth of his nature for the man whom he thought of as dead beyond all possible doubt. Then again, he had never been able to banish from his mind those few cold words which Ada Devereaux in her nervous terror had let slip when she had believed her own life to be in danger. Were those expressions of contempt the real promptings of her heart? And did she laugh at him in her sleeve as their tenor had led him to imply? Or were they merely due to the ebullition of temper he had witnessed, and as such void of meaning for him? He knew not what to think. His extreme sensitiveness on the point was in all probability heightened by the sense of youth and inexperience which he could not help feeling as he dwelt upon the subject, and remembered the riper years, culture and abilities of Mrs. Devereaux. "*A love-sick boy!*" What if it were her real opinion of him? The thorn had entered his heart, and he had not the strength to pluck it out.

It must not be supposed that "The Devereaux" (as the newly-joined subs had slangily called her) was not to some extent aware that a disturbance had taken place in Gerard's mind. She had learned to read him like the pages of an open book. His manner was changed. There were a thousand and one little trifles; minute in themselves, but far too big to escape the cool and calculating eye of a woman like Ada Devereaux; which told her it was true. She saw the effect, but she was at a loss to define the cause. Since life on board the "Montezuma" had of necessity thrown them much together, she naturally expected that the friendly relationship (to use no warmer expression) which had existed between them should be resumed. She was piqued and irritated beyond measure then to find that day succeeded day and yet those protestations of love, which the untimely appearance of the Yankee passenger had once before interrupted, returned to Gerard's lips no more. Her self-esteem had been so spoiled and flattered by the varied attentions lavished upon her by

men ever since she could remember, that she could not believe her power was curtailed, and she no longer possessed the art of drawing about her those upon whom she chose to smile. She who had been the acknowledged belle of many a crowded ball-room; it was incredible that one with so scant a knowledge of the world should be able to resist her fascination. In his case she had long since considered the game won. Yet it was not so. He no longer pursued her like a shadow, or hung upon her words, as if they alone had power to charm him. No longer did he bend over her, submissive to her will, and happy only in the sweet intoxication of her presence. And Ada Devereaux was not slow to mark the change, or backward in determining that she would discover the cause and lure him once more to her side.

"Pshaw!" she muttered to herself, "men cannot resist *me*. I can turn them inside out as easily as I would a glove, and this *boy* to escape me! The idea is too ridiculous." Languidly the folds of her fan stirred the soft

warm air about her and lifted the straying locks of hair from her brow, and she laughed lightly to herself as she thought what fools men were, and how easily they succumbed to a pretty face. How many lives had she embittered? To count them upon her fingers was impossible; was not that enough? And yet she had lived her life unscathed, save for that one rash folly when she was a mere child and had known no better, and allowed herself to be carried away by the impulse of the moment. But the scar which had been a deep wound then had healed, and left her what she was. Her even rows of teeth closed tightly, and her lips, which men had loved to look upon and longed to kiss curled scornfully as she rose from her seat and sought her cabin, with the firm resolve to bring her truant lover to her feet that night more hopelessly entangled than ever.

Pale moonbeams bathed the snowy clouds of sail in silver light when Ada Devereaux next appeared. The deck was deserted save

for the motionless figure of the helmsman, the officer of the watch, and Gerard. Oh, yes! she had known that he was there; she had heard his footstep above her head as she read (or tried to read) by the dim light of an oil-lamp in the seclusion of her own berth.

"Hermit-like, you are alone, Mr. Clarencourt, and shall I frankly tell you I am glad of it?" she said as she found him.

"Why?" stammered Gerard, who was unprepared for her sudden appearance.

"Because it is so lovely and quiet to-night. Besides I detest being worried by people I do not care to speak to, and Mr. Wyndam, the mate, bores me with his platitudes and ignorance, when I have ventured to intrude upon his solitude. Another very substantial reason for my wishing to see you alone is that I have something to say to you—a question to ask."

To Gerard's impulsive lips there rose something like an appeal that she should ask from him what she would, but he checked himself in time. Pride came to the rescue and re-

minded him that it were wiser not, so he contented himself by saying gently:

"And that question, Mrs. Devereaux, is——"

"Not so fast, Mr. Clarencourt. Perhaps you will scarcely credit me, but I want to prolong this conversation, I have seen so little of you of late. How gloriously beautiful the sea is on a night like this. Do you remember when we first met?" She lifted her eyes to his, and half veiled them with the deep fringed lids, as she asked the question.

"You *know* I do. How should I forget?"

"Ah! you men fail to remember many things when it suits you, and who knows but you may see fit to permit your memory to desert you at odd times. What says the old song?

> 'Tis folly to remember,
> 'Tis wiser to forget.'

I believe in the maxim, but I confess I cannot always carry it into effect. Well, you remember that night then, when we wandered so far into the gardens, and completely lost all trace of Colonel Steele and

poor Geoffrey Carelesse! How fearfully jealous he was, dear fellow. It was quite too absurd."

"He *jealous!* By what right, and of whom?" asked Gerard quickly.

"By the best that a man can have, I suppose. He was one of my most devoted admirers."

"Was he? I was not aware of it," answered Gerard bluntly.

"True though, I can assure you. Then those pleasing reminiscences of our introduction have not *quite* faded from your recollection, although you have greatly changed since then."

"In what respect?"

"In every way, and the reason for your unaccountable behaviour I have yet to learn. Tell it me frankly, Mr. Clarencourt, and let us be friends at any rate."

She had come there to conquer, to reduce him to submission, and to do this she would sink her pride to pander to her policy. She would lay him in the dust at her feet, and to

accomplish her purpose, what matter how low she stooped herself? The bare remembrance of his money was sufficient to cause her to thrust aside all other feelings. Every dog has its day, and hers was to come. Her voice acted like a spell upon Gerard. He could scarce believe his ears. Ada Devereaux, so supercilious, and unbending, and yet so beautiful, to consent to sue to *him*. He must be dreaming! But there she was by his side. Why had he thought ill of her? Why had his conduct been so churlish when she had loved him through it all? For one brief moment the blood coursed wildly in his veins, and his pulse beat deliriously.

"What a brute I have been!" he burst forth. "Forgive me. God knows I have suffered. Ever since that day when I dared to speak to you of love something has come between us, and I have thought that you could not care for one so utterly beneath you—so miserably inferior, as I am! I trembled and shrunk at my own audacity. Ada, you shall hear me now! For one kiss

from your lips, to awaken the love in your eyes, I would give my soul. Tell me that I am wrong! Tell me that you do not scorn my love, that at least you are not angry. My darling, speak, and take this load of misery from me." He had drawn her under the shadow of the mizen-mast. His arm was round her, no eye was near to see. The great passion of his nature burnt like fire within him. He felt her tremble in his clasp; the beating of her heart and the agitated movement of her bosom told him all that he cared to learn. He wound his arm about her, and pressed his lips to hers, soft and warm, and oh! how sweet to him, as he sought her gaze. She was his now, and with one long embrace he strained her to his breast.

"Oh God! Ada, how I love you. Let me hear you say that you love me."

Her head was on his shoulder. The tresses of her hair brushed his cheek. Her breath was breathed by him. In that brief instant ten thousand joys were merged in one.

"Yes, *I love you*," she whispered, and as she spoke, in the depths of her eyes there shone the light that men had raved of, the glance that had smitten Gerard under the Indian moon, and while the low sweet strains of the native regiment had played "Venetia."

CHAPTER VII.

NIGH UNTO DEATH.

The canary twittered in its gilded prison, and the pointer basked contentedly before the fire, which blazed merrily in the breakfast-room at The Towers. The remains of the morning's meal had been removed by the servants, and the apartment wore an air of cosy neatness. It was tenanted by Sir George and Lilian. The baronet stood with his back to the ruddy blaze, clad in a rough shooting-coat, thick boots, and a pair of stout gaiters, whilst his daughter reclined on a sofa drawn close to the window, which opened down to the ground, and commanded an extensive view of the gardens and the sea beyond. The flight of time had brought in its train no changes save to Lilian. Once clear of the grounds

of Clifford's Wood, on that eventful evening when she had broken the news of Gerard's supposed death to Mrs. Clarencourt, which way she had turned and whither her steps had led her, she never knew. But at a late hour of the night she had been found lying on the ground, mid-way between the two estates, insensible, drenched with rain and in a high state of fever. Weeks of a long and dangerous illness ensued, during which she had hovered on the verge of death. At length the tide of life had set strong in her favour, all danger passed, and she was declared convalescent.

"Well, Lilian," said the baronet, "how soon do you think you will be prepared to leave here?"

"What, Sidcombe, father?" asked the girl, as she turned her head wearily, and as though life had lost its charm for her.

"Yes, dear. Your mother and I have talked the matter over. Change of air, fresh faces, and new sights and scenes would all aid my little girl in her recovery."

"Oh! I shall soon be quite strong again without going away, and I love the old place so much. There can be nothing in the wide world like it to me."

"Please God, you will in the course of a few weeks be yourself once more. You must get well, for my sake, for it worries me terribly to see you out of sorts. As far as the place is concerned it is well enough in its way, but I think, and so do the doctors, that a run over to the south of France would do you good."

Lilian sighed. It was one of the first days on which she had been permitted to exchange the atmosphere of her bed-room for that of the lower regions. Yet she experienced no gladness of heart, no buoyancy of spirit, at the prospect held out to her of renewed health and strength. Who shall attempt to analyze or account for the feelings of others? Each one of us is of a different temperament, as dissimilar as the leaves upon the trees. Then who shall fathom the depths of grief,

or comprehend the greatness of the joys—to which all of us are subject? Surely God only! To Lilian Fabyn's nervously sensitive and loving nature the recovery from illness, the certain knowledge that she would live, and in living suffer, was the slow and painful return to consciousness of the person who has been stricken with some sudden and unlooked-for news. Her grief was poignant. The greater, that she could confide in no one from her sense of pride. The heavier to bear, since she had not even the satisfaction of knowing that the love for which she languished could ever have been hers. Sir George was not slow to read; he had watched her narrowly, and as he stood with his back leaning carelessly against the mantelshelf, the sadness and utter dejection which he saw so visibly stamped upon her features went straight to his honest heart. His daughter was the only being upon earth whom he really cared for (since his marriage with Lady Fabyn had certainly

not been productive of love, the sentiment existing between them being a sort of good-natured indifference on both sides), and to see her thus, so young, yet so void of hope, affected him painfully, and struck him sharply as the barbed point of an arrow.

"Yes, think it over, dear, and you and I will start at the beginning of the week. It will never do for you to be moped to death in this sleepy hole. You will get all sorts of morbid sentiments into your little head."

"Just as you wish. Anything and anywhere you like; only, I am not worth half the trouble I cause you. There is my hand, father; I agree," she added playfully; and Sir George, as he took it in his, thought how thin and white it had become.

"Don't, don't, Lilian. You'll make an old man of me before my time if you speak like that. You just pull yourself together, and you will be as right as a trivet in no time. Is there anything I can get for you before I go?"

"Nothing, thanks. I like to be idle and think."

"Sure?"

"Positive. Kiss me before you leave me."

Sir George did as she desired him, and then hastily quitted the room, with something like a tear glistening in his kindly eye, and the thought in his heart of what would become of him should she never get well.

"How good of him to think of me so much!" pondered Lilian when the door was closed and she was alone. "What care I where I go, now that I have none to live for? —now that I can watch the sun rise or set, and almost wish that it was for the last time? If it were not wicked, I would pray that it might lift its golden disc above the horizon for me no more; for with it comes the morning to rob me of my only comfort, sleep! Would that I could sleep *his* sleep, for then at least I should be nearer him. And yet he never knew that I loved him. And this is all that is left me to remind me of what he was."

As she spoke, with her thin, trembling

fingers she pulled out a locket, small and insignificant in appearance, from where it had lain concealed in the bosom of her dress, which, when opened, revealed a miniature photograph of Gerard, evidently taken some years ago, from the extremely juvenile caste of countenance it displayed.

"Poor Gerard!" she murmured softly to herself; "I need nothing to remind me of you. I have only to think for an instant, and then I see you plainly as in life. You will never know how much I have and shall suffer for your sake—never know how much I love and shall love you while life lasts, and when all this pain is over for me too, then, please God, we shall meet in a happier, better place. Ah, well, I must not grieve too much, for what would father do should—should I die first?"

The traces of tears were visible on her pale cheeks, from which the rosy hue that had mantled in them once, delicate as the inside lining of a sea-shore shell, had fled. Sounds as of footsteps drawing nearer on the

terraced walk outside the window attracted her attention, and without moving from her reclining position, she turned her gaze in that direction, inwardly wondering who it could be. She had not long to wait before she saw the figure of a man carrying a basket; and before he had passed out of sight, she had sprung from her couch, her face, if it were possible, whiter than ever, and with nervous fingers had slipped back the bolt which served as a fastening for the French windows.

"Wilson! Wilson! can it be possible? Is that you, or am I dreaming?"

The figure turned round at the sound of her voice. It *was* Wilson, Gerald Clarencourt's servant. Without a word, she re-entered the room, and beckoned the man to follow her.

"Glad to see you up and about, miss, again. They told me you'd been ill, and I just thought to myself that I'd walk over and bring you a few of our grapes, which is real fine."

Lilian's face was rigid as marble, and her

teeth were set in a desperate effort to be calm.

"Thank you so much for your kindness and thought for me. But you went with——"

"Yes—yes, miss, I know what you was about to say; but——"

"But what?" she interrupted, almost fiercely.

"You'll be askin' me why I'm here, and alone. I'll tell you it all, miss, if you'll give me time, though God knows, to speak on it just harrows my very soul up like. But as He hears me, I ain't to blame. The way of it was this. We'd left Calcutta, and was returnin' home, when one night I was flung out o' my bed. We'd run right into another ship. Well, somehow it got about that she was sinkin' fast. I only see'd Mr. Gerard twice: once on the deck, when I couldn't get near him for the crowds o' passengers and them grinnin', yellin' Lascars, and once after he'd got into the only boat as got clear of the ship."

"Thank God!" burst from Lilian's lips.

"No, no! miss, don't mistake me. I wish I thought what you do; but I can't—not no how."

"Tell me—you saw Mr. Clarencourt in the only boat which left the ship. Then you were with him. Where is he?"

"Where is he, miss? Ah! God alone knows. It's just that same that I'd give the whole of my days to learn. Yes, the last as I see'd of Mr. Gerard was in that boat. He'd taken an oar with the rest, and was pullin' all his might against great mountains of seas, which rolled him away out o' sight in a moment, and I've never seen or heard of him from that day to this. It was only in the morning that he'd leapt overboard to save one of the men as tumbled from the rigging. And he brought him aboard, too. There wasn't a passenger in the ship as didn't cheer until they were hoarse—he was that brave and handsome. Well, miss, amongst us we knocked up a sort o' raft; and though the waves washed right over us, we hung on like grim death until we

was picked up by a steamer. But, oh! miss, I wish something had happened to me too afore Mr. Gerard and me had been parted."

"But—but surely there is hope. He may have been rescued, too, by some passing vessel," Lilian contrived to suggest.

"I don't think it. I wish I could; but the sea was that awful; and besides, ther've been no word of him since. No, I'm not goin' to think of it. It would only be buildin' up false hopes."

"You believe Mr. Clarencourt has been drowned, beyond a doubt?"

"Don't ask me no more, miss; I can't bear to speak of it. He was all I had to care for, though I was his servant, and—and now he's gone!" Overcome by his feelings, Wilson buried his face in his hands, and sobbed aloud, his own grief preventing him from noticing how much his listener was affected.

"Now, miss," he continued, rising, "I've made a fool of myself, besides puttin' you about, and I'll just get clear away, if you'll let me, without any one bein' the wiser. I'd

never hear the last of it from Sir George, if he knew that I'd been up here excitin' you, and you scarce up and about again. Mr. Gerard thought a terrible deal of you, miss, and used often to speak of you and the old days afore he fell in with the hussy as blasted his life, or would have done if he'd lived."

"Who do you mean?" asked Lilian, breathlessly.

"One of the passengers; a lady as he met in Calcutta. He was just daft about her. And now you knows all I can tell you, miss, and more than I ought to have said to anyone; but you was always Mr. Gerard's friend."

"Do you remember the lady's name?" asked Lilian quietly.

"Devereaux; Mrs. Devereaux. She was a widow, young and handsome as a picture, but no more safe than a mad dog, and that's what I made bold to tell Mr. Gerard. But it wasn't for him to listen to the likes o' me, and I ought to have know'd better."

"Thanks, Wilson, you may go, for I feel

rather fatigued. I am so fond of grapes, and I know of old that those grown at Clifford's Wood are the finest in the countryside; you couldn't have brought me anything I like better."

"I'm glad of that, miss, and if I've not put you about with troublin' you over Mr. Gerard, I've not come here for nothin' and I'll go back the better of havin' let out my feelin's to some one."

"Promise me one thing, Wilson."

"That I will, without askin' first what it is."

"Should you hear any news of Mr. Clarencourt, you will communicate with me at once. And, you know, I might be away from home. In fact, in a few days I shall have left here for the Continent; so that it would be necessary to write to this address, and then the letters will be forwarded to me wherever I may be. You see, Wilson, I have known Mr. Clarencourt all my life, and naturally I am very anxious that these terrible doubts as to his safety should be set at rest."

"It's only right, miss, what you ask, and you may depend I'll not forget."

"There is no positive proof that anything has happened, and the very doubt means hope to me."

"If I could think as you do, miss, I should feel like a new man; but hope ain't left in me now. I wouldn't feel broke up this way if I could think of them four little letters. But God bless you, miss! I remember the two of you when you was no bigger than six penn'orth o' ha'pence and used to romp together in the old days, and mortal teases you was, miss, askin' your pardon for sayin' so. It all comes back on me now; and there's not a foot o' ground for miles round as doesn't call to mind *his* face. *His face*——"

Excess of feeling choked the remainder of his sentence. He could trust himself no longer, and with an old red cotton handkerchief pressed to his eyes Wilson staggered out into the garden and once again Lilian was alone and free to give vent to a pent-up

torrent of mental agony, to control which had caused her the most exquisite torture. When the servants found her unconscious half-an-hour afterwards, it would have been difficult to recognize in her pallid, grief-stricken face the happy, laughing, and admittedly lovely Lilian Fabyn of a few weeks back. And so revolves Time's wheel, and the deep rut that marks its passage ineffaceably stamps each and all.

CHAPTER VIII.

A RECOGNITION.

"My dear madam, you must if possible discover the cause for this sudden change in your daughter's condition. She will tell us nothing. My opinion is that she has been excited by some painful revelation and that a shock, with which her physical powers are too weak to cope, is the cause to which we must attribute this relapse. Now you must pardon me, dear Lady Fabyn, for speaking so plainly, but I feel it to be my duty. You, as her mother, can do her more good by digging to the root of this matter and guarding against a repetition, than I with all my drugs and science. For the present, take her away. In my day I have seen a change of scene work wonders when all else has failed."

Such were the words addressed to Lady

Fabyn by the kind-hearted and keen-witted local practitioner, after a consultation with a leading London physician. That her ladyship believed in them most religiously was beyond a doubt. In the first place she had displayed all her tact, and exercised freely her eloquence to induce Lilian to throw some light upon the reason of that sudden fainting-fit. But in vain, and her inquiries through the servants proved just as unavailing. They knew nothing. Nobody knew anything, and nobody under the circumstances could be expected to account for Miss Lilian's "*hun*accountable 'abits." After this fashion did the housekeeper grumble to herself while shut up in her own den, surrounded by physic bottles, recipes for delicate condiments, plasters, and poultices. With one other balm did she salve her conscience, and it was to the effect that Miss Lilian had not been left alone ten minutes, and not a soul had been near her. On that score she was prepared to take her solemn affidavit. In the second place, Lady Fabyn had adhered strictly to the doctor's injunc-

tions, for the morning had come when Lilian was to be bundled off bag and baggage for change of air. It was all arranged. The Bradshaw had been studied, the trains decided upon, and Lady Fabyn had lowered her gold eye-glasses and closed that most mystifying of railway guides with a sigh of contentment. She had had her own way, though that gratification did not prevent her from turning everything upside down and placing the whole house and its inmates at sixes and sevens, by a multiplicity of useless orders and fussy exactions, which made every one miserable save herself. Cosily ensconced in the well-padded depths of the railway carriage, which was to convey them to town, with her feet resting on a foot-warmer, and her daughter opposite to her, Lady Fabyn felt on good terms with herself and the world in general.

"Sure you are quite comfortable?" she asked, addressing Lilian, who signified her assent. "Wrap the furs well about your throat, dear. The doctor impressed upon me the importance of your being most careful to

avoid a chill or draughts. How unfortunate it was that those stupid business affairs should have cropped up to detain poor dear Sir George." Lady Fabyn invariably spoke of her husband as though he were deceased.

"Yes, mother; but it can't be helped."

"I know that, child, but it will delay us in town for a day or two until he can join us. Very provoking, since the London fogs won't bring the roses back to your cheeks, though we shall have a glimpse of the dear old place." Lilian's sympathies did not incline towards even a fleeting visit to the gay capital, so she said nothing.

"I always thought that Mrs. Clarencourt was selfish in the extreme," continued her ladyship, abruptly changing the conversation.

"Why, mother?" asked Lilian quickly, roused from the listless reverie into which she had fallen during her mother's uninteresting remarks by the sound of the well loved name.

"Why? because my knowledge of human nature, which is varied and extensive, tells me

as much. From the very first day I saw that woman I disliked her."

"And yet you were so friendly once," Lilian ventured to remonstrate.

"Nonsense, child, it was never so. As near neighbours I strove to make the best of her. It is so unpleasant to be constantly meeting people at the houses of mutual friends, and to feel that an unfriendly spirit exists. So very unpleasant, and besides it is not right. We ought to try to agree with every one, and for years I tried to keep on good terms with the Clarencourts, but it was all to no purpose. To sum her up in a few words, Lilian, she is soulless, and cares for no one but herself."

"But why did you quarrel?" inquired Lilian.

"Quarrel! how absurd, dear. People in our position in life *never* quarrel, we simply drop each other. I never went so far as that with Mrs. Clarencourt, or, as you know, it would have been impossible for me to have consented to your wish to convey to her the sad news of poor

Gerard's death. But there was no harm in that, though people say that she never loved him, and does not mourn his death as she should do; and some even go further." Lady Fabyn paused and glanced out of the window at the flying landscape. Her remark demanded an answer, she thought, and she waited for it without once looking at her daughter's face. It was drawn and whiter than the weeks of illness had left it. To be obliged to listen to what seemed to her, heartless comments upon his death was anguish, cruel as though she bared her bosom to the sharp stab of some keen pointed instrument. It made her gasp for breath as she shrank back in her corner, and tried to control the choking lump that rose in her throat and prevented her from speaking. Even Lady Fabyn, had she turned her head, could not have been so blind as not to read her distress, or so dense as to have mistaken the cause.

"Why, what has scandal to say on the subject, mother?" Lilian stammered at length.

"Oh! it's a long story."

"Let me hear it."

"I don't know that I ought to do so, though it's the talk of the place. Of course the servants were the medium, and you would have heard it all had you been well. As such stories generally do, it has come out after the one most concerned has ceased to exist."

"Who do you mean, mother?"

"Why, poor Gerard; who else could I mean, dear?" Lilian winced, and Lady Fabyn pursed up her lips and tried to look as though she were capable of uttering wisdom by the square yard.

"Well, my dear, of course it has always been understood that Mrs. Clarencourt married for money, and that her affections were never bestowed upon her husband. But now it seems that she has never loved her son, and in some measure that was his reason for going abroad."

"It is impossible!" broke from Lilian's lips.

"Why?"

"Because—because—a mother *must* love her child." She very nearly committed herself and said what she thought, that surely it was impossible not to love Gerard.

"So one would have imagined; but it appears not."

"Tell me, mother, you don't believe this to be true."

"Unfortunately there is little room for doubt, and however unwilling I may be to think ill of any one, I cannot be blind to such glaring truths. I heard it from the best authority. And more than that, the very fact of Gerard's demise places her in quite a different position. Had he lived to the age of twenty-five, I understand that everything, with the exception of a life annuity of no very large amount, which would have been all that she could claim under her husband's will, would have been his. Now, if in reality he is dead (which seems scarcely questionable,

since nothing has been heard of him for all these weeks), the money belongs to her. The whole story dovetails when you come to consider her temperament and past history. Ferrit, the lawyer, who knows all about her affairs, and has been consulted by her lately on some small local matters, told me in confidence, that instead of regretting his loss he should give it as his opinion that her sentiments were the very opposite in character, and that she was glad when she heard of his death."

"That I will never believe."

"Why not?"

"The expression of her face when I broke the—when I told her, I mean—was so full of horror and grief. No woman could be so bad and so lost to all feelings of love. No, mother; I can't and won't think so cruelly of her."

"My dear child, don't get so excited. The nine days' wonder is a thing of the past, though as to your remembering the expression of her face at the time, I should say, *that* is

highly improbable. Your illness had been coming on for weeks, and you must have been too unwell at the moment to pay any attention to her. But I blame myself greatly for having permitted you to walk so far, and on such an errand. However, there is no use in crying over spilt milk, and so we will change the subject."

By tacit consent the conversation flagged, and Lilian was free to pursue her own sad train of thoughts without interruption. What crime had she committed? Of what sins, she asked herself, was she guilty beyond the shortcomings of ordinary mortals, that her life should be blasted at the very outset by the sorrow that had rained so thick upon her? If Gerard were indeed dead (and she had begun to think that there was not the faintest chance of hope to the contrary), then the years to come had been robbed of their brightness for her. She mourned and wept for him as for one lost for ever. And as she peered out into the fast gathering gloom, to hide the tears that would come, and pre-

tended to decipher the names of the stations, as the express train thundered through them, so that her mother might not see the grief that stamped her features, she felt that her future was void of hope, and foreshadowed with a cloud that even the soothing influence of time could not disperse. Lady Fabyn, too, seemed preoccupied, and a complete silence was maintained between them until they steamed into Charing Cross. Their brougham was in readiness to convey them to Sir George's town house. But as the great gates of the station were left behind, and the carriage rolled into the Strand, her ladyship was startled by a low scream from Lilian.

"It is he, it is he!" she exclaimed, as frantically she tried to lower the glass, defeating her own efforts by her nervousness.

"Gracious me! my dear, you will kill me with fright. Who do you mean?"

"Gerard! Gerard Clarencourt! Quick! tell Thomson to turn the horses' heads, or

we shall miss him." As she spoke she gave her orders, which the coachman obeyed as soon as a block in the traffic would permit him to do so.

"Nonsense; you must have been mistaken. It could not have been Gerard Clarencourt. Some fancied resemblance deceived you. Can you see the person?"

Lilian craned her neck out of the window, and scanned the hurrying crowds of people with anxious eyes. Was it he? Could it have been Gerard alive and well? But nowhere could she see the form which had caused her heart to leap within her. The man (who ever he was) had disappeared, and at length she sank back in her seat again, while a sickening sensation of doubt and despair took possession of her.

"Your sight must have been at fault. Perhaps there was some slight likeness between the man you saw and Mr. Clarencourt," Lady Fabyn remarked in cold, measured tones. At length she suspected, and, with the rapidity of awakened suspicion, was adding two and two

together. But Lilian had not been mistaken. She had seen Gerard Clarencourt in flesh and blood.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WHITE CLIFFS OF KENT.

"Yes, I think that would be best. You know, Ada, I have told you my mother does not care as much for me as she might. I would not have spoken as I have to any one else, dearest, but from *you* I have no secrets. There was only one other who knew my feelings and all I have suffered. And now, none save yourself, for he is dead. No, I shall confide in no one, not even my mother."

"Well, do as you wish, Gerard."

"You see, there is just this in it. If I told her in as many words, that I love you (for I *do*, darling, you will never know *how* much), she might — well, she might (though it would be simply brutal of her), withhold her consent. Such conduct would

create bad blood between us. I should laugh at her remonstrances, or at all events, defy her commands, and marry you in spite of them."

"But why should she refuse?" asked Ada Devereaux, as with the aid of Gerard's arm, she paced the deck as the "Montezuma" rolled up channel before a stiff breeze from the westward. Perhaps as she put the question she was thinking of her early love, and of those youthful days when she had trusted only to be deceived. And as she did so, a shadow of suspicion crossed her mind. "What if he *were* to play me false?" she thought; but the next moment his answer rang in her ears, and her doubts were scattered to the winds.

"Because she does not know how beautiful you are. Because she does not, and can never know how worthy you are of the love of a god rather than of a man such as I. Because—and may He forgive me if my temper gets the better of my reason and I err—because she would not scruple to blight my only chance of happiness. For I cannot

live without you now, better that I were dead than lose your love. God help me, dearest, if you ever play me false; all other considerations are not worthy of a thought compared with your lightest wish, and yet I owe my mother much. Her unkindness and utter indifference to me drove me from home; but since it brought me to you I am her debtor, for you have taught me how to love."

"Poor Gerard! then you were never happy at home?"

"Happy, yes; but only during those years when my greatest griefs could be turned into smiles by a cake or a new toy. As childishness was lost in boyhood, I became sensible that something was wanting in my life, that there was a void, which the countless pleasures money could procure were powerless to satisfy. I wanted some one who would take an interest in me — some one to whom I could look for sympathy. Naturally I sought my mother, and when permitted to see her, would try by every device I

could think of to please. But I weary you, Ada, by this rigmarole about myself."

"No; how stupid of you to think so! Tell me all, everything."

"Sure you are not bored?"

"Quite."

She turned and gazed into his face as she answered him, and the smile that he loved lit up her features, and caused his pulse to quicken as he continued:

"Well, I learned to read her face; perhaps I am naturally over-sensitive, but I would watch her, and across her features and into her beautiful eyes—for she is beautiful—would steal a weariness when I was near. She kissed me coldly and never, as I thought, if she could avoid it, and often she was harsh and irritable, and a cross word would be followed by a cruel blow. I used to try to think that she must be right, and that I deserved this conduct at her hands, but that conviction passed, as I felt that she was unjust. I drew my own conclusions, and day by day the truth

dawned upon me that she did not love me. I spent whole hours in solitude, and became morbidly melancholy for one so young. The house was filled with guests of importance and rank, she was happy in her world. No laughter was gayer than hers—no jest more polished, and men bowed before her wit and beauty. If I but entered the room her mirth disappeared, and the servants were ordered to remove me upon the slightest pretext. So you will see that I did not know happiness until I met you. But let us change the subject. If this breeze holds we shall be in London in two days."

"So soon?"

"Yes."

"Thank goodness! I am sick of the sea. Give me *terra firma*. I am positively dying to see a good play, eat a well-cooked breakfast, and scan the pages of a newspaper. You will think me a horrible *gourmande*, but really pea soup and pork, varied by a change to salt beef, are too disgusting for

any woman to stand. My complexion will be ruined."

"Then I have never seen the inside petals of a rose."

"You jest. Besides comparisons are admittedly odious."

"In this case, to the rose. But you have been surfeited with compliments. Men have gone mad about you. Carelesse told me that Wharton of the Chandnagore Horse shot himself for hopeless love of you. And then that dashing man in the 10th, what's his name?"

"Garrick, Captain Garrick do you mean?" she asked quietly, with her lips just parted with a smile, which his vehement praise of her had called forth. She was so used to praise, and could never hear her own looks spoken of without thinking how slavishly idolatrous men were of a pretty face, and how meekly they lowered their colours before beauty backed with a small amount of tact. It was so stupid of them, poor silly creatures, to recklessly seek the honey because it gratified their taste, and never

to remember that their wings might become sticky and fail to assist them to fly when they found that the rose had a canker, that the shell was of delicate tint, but only filled with deceit and hypocrisy. Poor wretches, they were bad enough in themselves, but to their other crimes was added one which she scorned and laughed at—*weakness*.

"Yes, that was the name of the fellow. Well, he was hopelessly in love with you, wasn't he?"

"Really, I don't know—never thought of asking him."

"No, but he asked *you*, which is more to the purpose."

"And you may conclude your sentence by adding that I refused him."

"For what reason? From what Carelesse told me—for unfortunately I never had the pleasure of meeting Captain Garrick—I should judge that he was a very prince of men. Brave and handsome, a *beau sabreur*, an Apollo—an Admirable Crichton, an——"

"Don't be ridiculous, Gerard! Captain Garrick is like scores of other men, a very pleasant friend, but viewed from a matrimonial standpoint, ineligible." Which simply meant that, so far as Mrs. Devereaux was concerned, nothing could atone for the lack of wealth, and as it was a notorious fact that the aforesaid gentleman had permitted his substance to drain through the oily fingers of usurious Jews until little, if any, of it remained, her sentiments will be understood. But Gerard, of course, knew nothing of what was passing in her mind, and her remarks were calculated to inflame his vanity.

"And yet you, so critical in your ideas of men in general, of such refined taste, education, knowledge of the world, and last but not least, so beautiful, can care for *me*. My darling, you do me too much honour. I can scarcely credit my own senses, and am half in terror that some morning I shall awake to find you gone, and in waking learn that all these weeks of bliss have been a long and joyous dream, leaving behind them

but one blessing, the memory of the vanished hours," he answered as he bent towards her, with difficulty restraining the longing he felt to clasp her in his arms, despite the knowledge that several pairs of eyes were regarding them attentively.

"Pray that this breeze may blow as it does now, and then in two days ——"

"You shall be mine, dearest."

"Yes, yours, Gerard, and then some morning, when I want you to buy me heaps of pretty things, you will awake to wish your horrible reality had been a vision, a myth. Ah! don't contradict me. I know you men too well. Only tease you to untie your purse-strings oftener than you like, and the charm is broken. You must have your clubs, your horses, and heaps of other little extravagances too numerous to mention, though, of course, equally insignificant, not to add inexpensive. Rob you of your comforts in the very least, and instantly you break out into open rebellion. Then you must have your charming little amours,

interesting and innocent, of course, which we perforce must never see, exciting peccadilloes, pleasing traits of character which must be treated with respect and (you will not think me vulgar) winked at. In *us*, they would each and all constitute heinous crimes. Am I not right?"

"Partly."

"Wholly, you should say."

"I don't agree with you in the least. There are always two sides to a question, and you have fought on the one only. If you think so ill of mankind ——"

"There, now you are going to argue. You know what my opinion is of *you*."

"Let me hear it again. Do you love me?"

"You know I do. If I tell you too often, you will take it as a matter of course and become conceited, but for the very last time *I do*. Good-bye. This wind is positively piercing, and so before I catch cold I shall leave you."

Laughingly she kissed her hand as she disappeared down the companion ladder, and

Gerard, who knew that he should see her no more that evening, watched her out of sight, and then leaned over the taffrail, and softly repeated to himself:

> "Sleep dwell in thine eyes,
> Peace in thy breast.
> Would I were sleep and peace,
> So sweet to rest."

And whilst he thought thus, Ada Devereaux was gazing at the reflection of her own fair features by the aid of an ivory-backed hand glass. Rounded, patrician, and delicately beautiful they were. With a smile of gratified vanity she concluded her inspection, tossed the mirror into her dressing-bag, and muttered to herself as she closed the case:

"I weary of the game. It has lasted too long, and he bores me. He is so *exigeant* and irritable that I fear to trifle with him. The price is heavy, yet I have nearly paid it, and in a few days more the reward must be mine. *His money!* The fools! how blind they are."

CHAPTER X.

THE LANGHAM.

MEANWHILE the other actors in this little drama were scattered far and wide in different directions. On the distant plains of Afghanistan, exposed alike to intense heat and bitter cold, in that climate of two extremes, Geoffrey Carelesse, with his regiment of the 10th, had been clean forgotten and lost sight of by those who had lounged and played billiards, baccarat and whist with him in the clubs, as well as by the scores of men who had voted him a deuced good fellow, helped him to spend his money, and enjoyed his hospitality. They would receive him with open arms when he returned, if he should ever do so, always providing that there was no lack of that which would be certain to secure him a welcome—a plentiful supply of

the needful. And so he became bronzed and sinewy with constant exercise in the keen mountain air, midst the quick-witted, loose-robed Afghan warriors. Happy but for two reasons, the constant presence and persecutions of his *bête noire*, Colonel Steele, and regret for the absence, mingled with an all-absorbing desire to look again upon the face of the woman whose image was stamped upon his heart. Duty had forced him to quit her side, but time had not caused him to forget his vow. Should he ever return to the old country he had promised himself to seek out Ada Devereaux and win her love, spite of all opposition.

Lady Fabyn and Sir George (who had joined his wife and daughter) had arrived in Cannes, and thither in a few days they had been pursued by the Honourable Jim Ledsham, who (encouraged by her ladyship) was determined to prosecute his suit.

The fashionable little watering-place of Sidcombe was almost empty, and the good folks of the town were beginning to sigh for a

return of the *élite* of the district, and with them an increase of trade. Mrs. Clarencourt had deserted Clifford's Wood for town, leaving the servants, and amongst them Wilson, to lament the loss of their young master.

The clipper trader "Montezuma" had for a fortnight past been safely moored to the quay-side in the South West India Dock, and the Langham Hotel boasted of two new arrivals, who had duly inscribed their names in the visitors' book as Mr. and Mrs. Gerard Clarencourt. The abruptness of this announcement will awaken no feelings of surprise in the minds of those who have scanned these pages, when they reflect how easily such steps are taken along a path whither there is no return. It was too true. Ada Devereaux had attained her end. With perfect tact, she had displayed an outward semblance of affection, and Gerard had availed himself of the ready facilities afforded him by a special licence. In the apartment which they had appropriated sat Gerard's wife alone, and if one might venture

to hazard an opinion after a close scrutiny of her face, by no means in the most amiable of tempers. Even the few days which had passed since his marriage had been lengthy enough to prove to Gerard that the woman whom he had chosen to set up as his idol and had installed in his heart as a kind of superior being, fair and faultless, was not devoid of those eccentricities of character, to use no harsher term, so common to mortals. She had a temper of no puny order—he had discovered as much, thanks to a multiplicity of trifles, which she had been at no pains to conceal. And so, after some keen-edged satire, delivered with a point which had lost none of its sharpness in her hands, Gerard had gone out, feeling irritated, and at variance with himself and the world in general. Already strange fears had crossed his mind that all was not as it should be. Doubts, that the more he pondered upon, seemed to take tangible form and confront him like a cloud of witnesses, which made up the sum total of wretchedness to

him, though contained in very few words: *she did not love him.* He had repeated it to himself again and again, and the suspicion had strengthened with the repetition. He had banged the door after him and left the hotel, a prey to mingled feelings of passion and dejection, but the chill night air as it blew in his face as he turned down Regent Street soothed his feverish pulse and made him pause to consider, with the result that after an hour's aimless wandering he had hailed a cab and ordered the driver to convey him back to the Langham. He would seek her at once, and hear from her lips again those few sweet words, which would chase away for ever his cruel misgivings, and restore him to peace. With this intent he hastened along the well-carpeted corridors, scaled the flight of stairs three steps at a time, and stood in her presence. She had drawn a large easy chair to the fireside, stirred the glowing coals until the flames crackled and leapt up the chimney, filling the room with a warm cheery light, and sat

herself down, with her small satin-shod feet planted firmly upon the fender, and a huge white feather fan in her hand, with which she protected her delicate complexion from the heat, but from behind the folds of which her features were clearly limned against the pale-tinted wall paper. Thus she waited for her husband's return, for she too had something to ask of him.

"And so you have come back! Well, has the night air cooled your temper?" she asked. Her blue eyes sparkled as she spoke, and she clutched the handle of the fan tighter.

For the brief space of a second Gerard's anger seemed likely to get the better of his judgment; but the look passed.

"Why do you speak so? Are you blameless?"

"Blameless! No. Who is? Not you, certainly."

"That is as it may be."

"Oh, of course you are right and every one else wrong; the old story, which I used to

hear from Devereaux's lips just as often as he chose to think himself aggrieved."

Gerard winced. The sound of another man's name spoken by her, smote painfully upon his ear. He hated to think that she had ever belonged to any one but himself.

"You men are too absurd," she continued. "You fancy yourselves incapable of error—always more sinned against than sinning."

"Ada! how can you speak so?"

"There is surely no harm in the truth. Besides, I wish to guard against a second edition of sermonizing. We may as well understand each other at once."

"It is for that very reason I have returned. I speak hastily and inadvisedly at times."

"Really, what a concession! You astound me! Perhaps you may go further and concede something more—a very important item, since we have contrived to quarrel."

"*Quarrel*, Ada! Oh, my God! My wife but of a few weeks, and yet have you so soon learned to use language that should never leave your lips? You said you loved me. In

the brief hours that we have spent together your manner has repelled me. It has undergone a change since we stood on the deck of the 'Montezuma' and plighted our troth."

"Nonsense! You fancy something improbable, of course."

"Improbable! God grant that it may be; but I am here to learn the truth. You seem to have no heart. You shrink from my advances, evade my embraces! What does it mean?"

"Nothing, don't be stupid! I am getting rather tired of London, and want a change. It is too cold for me. I hate cold. And more than that, it affects my health."

"Your health, my darling! Then we will leave at once—anyhere with *you*."

"I know that; but the question is, where can we go?"

"Oh, there are heaps of places."

"I can't bear this humdrum existence, shut up and seeing no one. I want to launch out and enjoy life. Every one seems to have forgotten me, I have been away so long; but I

intend to do you credit, and shine as no second-rate leader of fashion. We must go abroad until these horrible London fogs have vanished. I went to India when I was so young that I know little or nothing of the continent. I should like to travel leisurely from town to town. I detest moving too often, but a change just when we feel inclined would not be fatiguing; and I think one ought to know Cannes, Mentone, and Venice. To exchange these rickety hansoms for a real gondola would be charming, although I suppose they are much like other boats. Still I must be *au fait* with everything."

"Yes, very delightful; but——"

"Then when these detestable east winds have blown themselves out," she continued, interrupting him, "we could return and go into society."

"But, my darling, to live so extravagantly we must have money."

"*Money!* Of course. One can't exist without money."

"Precisely; but I have only six hundred a year."

As he spoke he scanned her face narrowly. Probably it was due to the strained relationship which existed between himself and his mother that he had never explained to her his financial position. Perhaps, too, his own sense of security upon this point (aware as he was of the large income which would be at his disposal when he attained his majority) had caused him to neglect it. Certain it was that no explanation had passed between them.

"Six hundred a year," he repeated, "but——"

The expression of her face, as she turned towards him, made him withhold the remainder of his sentence. A painful suspicion flashed through his mind, and in silence he awaited her reply.

"What did you say? Pardon me; I do not comprehend you," said Ada.

Her features were white as the marble mantelshelf against the corner of which, in her agitation and unsuccessful attempt to be

calm, she struck her foot. Her teeth were clenched under her closely-compressed lips, and her blue eyes sparkled with the same angry fire that had shone in them when Geoffrey Carelesse had seen fit to force himself upon her privacy in Calcutta. She looked as though she had heard his words and defined their meaning, spite of her avowal to the contrary. Had she been deluded into believing this man rich, when in reality he was poorer than herself? If so, where were her golden dreams of wealth and luxury, pomp and circumstance? What had become of her visions of carriages, liveried servants, unlimited credit at her dressmakers and jewellers, a West-end mansion, a box at the opera, a yacht, and other little luxuries upon which she had set her heart? They seemed to have taken to themselves wings and flown away.

"I thought I spoke plainly enough. My income is six hundred a year," he repeated.

"Gerard, you are trifling with me. It is *impossible!*"

She *could not* believe him. It was too much to expect her to credit this, and thus at one fell swoop to relinquish all the costly toys which she had believed would be hers by reason of the marriage with which she had bought them. Too much to expect she could hear calmly that the price she had set upon herself could never be paid. For a moment she was silent, and then she could hold her peace no longer.

"Are you so blind as to have imagined I should ever have married you had I known this? You have deceived me—simulated a position which you knew was not yours, and entrapped me into marrying a veritable pauper in disguise. Are you aware that by taking your name I have lost the income left me by Colonel Devereaux, conditionally upon my remaining a widow?"

Her form literally shook with anger as she put the question, and turned round upon him in the full glare of the gaslight, her face ablaze with wrath like a tigress cheated of her prey. In the momentary silence which

ensued between them, before his answer should decide whether he should become subject to her caprice, or assert his authority and deny the foul blot thus cast upon his honour—in that brief respite from the storm of her passion, Gerard, as he confronted his wife, thought that never before had she seemed to him so radiantly beautiful. But though in the long days of the future the minutest details of that scene remained fixed in his memory, and he upbraided himself for his hastiness, and yearned for her love, he did not now hesitate. Though his happiness was at stake, his heart wrung to the very core, his honour wounded, he was calm and possessed. The pride of his race could not brook the insults heaped upon him, and he hurried along the path which alone pointed to an outlet, and whence the return was difficult and almost impossible to his nature.

"How should I be aware of it, any more than I was that money is your god?" he answered at length. "Now I know that it

is *I* who have been deceived—*you* who have practised the deception."

"It is false!"

"Pardon me, I differ from you; but before the clock has gone its round, and the sun has risen again, it will matter little either way. But you shall hear me for a brief space without interruption, and then I will tax your patience no further. It is *I*, I repeat, who have been deceived, *you* who have played the part of an artful and designing woman. *You* who have won my heart, and in exchange have offered me what—one of stone, incapable of feeling, and lusting only for the gold which you saw fit to believe was mine. You have shorn me of the greatest gift, the noblest blessing of man—that of freedom. Between you and me love does not exist. *My image* has been set up by you, because it pleased you to mark me down as your quarry. From this moment, yours, which had been dearer to me than my life's blood, had you shown yourself worthy, shall be as a thing of the past—forgotten."

"Have you ended your heroics? Because, when you have, I should like to hazard a remark."

"Not yet; and they will need no answer when over. You thought that, because you had by base subterfuge acquired my name, your beauty would be a warrant for my submission, and you would force an entrance to my purse, which weakness and love for you on my part would open at your pleasure. You have overshot the mark. This night I have discovered your perfidy, and before its close I leave you for ever. You have secured a husband at my expense, but henceforth one in name only."

"Yes, I have heard these wild tirades before," she remarked, as, interrupting him, she changed her position from chair to sofa, where, with her head resting upon her hand, she beat time upon the floor with the heel of her slipper, as though the measured music of a waltz rang in her ears.

"I dare say! Probably I am not the first by many whose lives you have ruined."

"Ruined *you!* Ha, ha, ha! Well, that is droll. Why, you have not lived long enough to learn your good fortune. I have thrown myself away upon you, when few men, had I chosen to make myself agreeable to them, could have escaped me."

"You may save yourself the trouble of recounting your innumerable conquests. Poor fools, we cannot detect the poison when so deftly administered and enfolded in the rose leaves which nature has taught you to use as a disguise to aid your machinations."

"Really! You become quite eloquent."

"Then the sooner will you learn how attempts such as you have made, although backed up by your beauty, have failed."

"Like your banking account, I suppose!"

"No, things were never quite so bad with me in reality, as your satire would paint them. Ada, we are both very young—too young to stand as we do on the verge of a precipice."

Even then, at that eleventh hour, when the

ties that ought to have been so strong and capable of binding them together, were about to be snapped, and the links that formed the chain were to be broken up and scattered broadcast, even then, Gerard could have forgiven. Could she not *learn* to love him? His very soul was torn and harrowed by the bare contemplation of the step he meditated. Round beads of agony stood out upon his forehead, tears welled up into the kindly depths of his blue eyes, and he hid his face in his hands. Would she not yet speak, and tell him there was some hope of love between them hereafter? Would she not hint that in the untrodden years which stretched out before them time might work changes, and the hour come when she would return his affection? It was not too late. Why was she silent? He scarce breathed as he wrestled with his new-born sorrow and listened for those words which (had they come then) would have saved him many a sleepless night—many a moment of keenest mental suffering. At

length she spoke, and each syllable as it smote upon his ear stung him to the quick and penetrated through every fibre of his body like liquid fire.

"Spare me all that rigmarole. I know it by heart. I have heard it before, and it must be the same, for you men are all alike. You would lecture now on your own noble character as compared with mine. I will save you the trouble, and at the same time prove to you that you (amongst other lords of creation) are not to be worshipped for what you are pleased to consider as your good looks, if you ever had any, but for that which you were credited with possessing—a comfortable banking account. I married you——"

"For what?"

"Your money. I admit it. The investment has proved a worthless one, but——"

"God forgive you, for I cannot. You could scheme, and watch me fall into the trap laid for me by your devilish arts with a smile on your face, and a lie on your lips. You have built for me a hell; but

I will live in it alone. Take care that you do not fall into the snare you have laid for me. Some day you may love, and should that hour ever come, I will pray God to shield you from the misery I suffer. Good-bye, once and for ever, my wife from henceforth in name only."

The door opened and closed, and she was alone.

CHAPTER XI.

ANYWHERE, IT MATTERS NOT.

"WHERE to, sir?"

"Paddington," was Gerard's answer, as he entered a hansom, considerably damaging his brand new Lincoln and Bennett as he did so.

"It's all over now between us; henceforth we are nothing to each other. Oh, my darling! my darling! and yet I love you so." As he spoke the words, scarcely above his breath, he tried to catch a glimpse of the lighted windows of the hotel. "Too late! too late!" he muttered, in answer to his own thoughts, as the cab took another turning, bearing him further and further from his wife. *His wife!* What a mockery, and yet she *was* his, and he was hers, and they twain were doomed to a living tomb until death should dissolve the bond of union, and release one or other of them. With

every stride of the horse, as it bore him rapidly on, momentarily increasing the distance between himself and her he held so dear—with each instant, as it winged its flight, grew up a blank and hopeless void within his heart. With the minutes came reflection ; but reflection had not enabled him to estimate or understand the gravity of the step he had taken. Where should he go, what should he do? Almost mechanically he solved those two questions. He had fully intended running down to Clifford's Wood and acquainting his mother with the fact of his marriage. He had concealed everything from her hitherto, and had not even informed her of his arrival in England. He had pursued this course for two reasons. First of all he had told himself that she would be more than likely to seek to come between him and the object of his affections. The second was as probable and as easy to understand. He had been supremely happy. There had been so much to do, so many shops to visit, theatres to enjoy, and he had had not a spare half hour to call his own. That had

been before his marriage—and since, why he had been at first anxious, then unhappy, and so his good resolutions had fallen to the ground, and the letter he had contemplated writing had never been penned. Now the only difference was that instead of one secret he had two. Hastily though he had quitted the Langham, he had formed the resolution before leaving of going to Clifford's Wood and confiding his grief to her. Perhaps she had missed him; and the old saying that:

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder,"

might be applicable in his case. At all events, he would try. As an opium eater slowly recovering consciousness, and as a drunkard whom the effects of a deep carouse has left in a kind of lethargy, in such a state was Gerard as the cab pulled up in the station and a crowd of porters surrounded him, each anxious to outdo the other and secure a job. He was perfectly cognizant of everything that went on around him, yet he

seemed to be under the influence of some unholy spell, which dulled his senses, causing him to feel as though he were in a mist of whirling, troublous thoughts, void of form and vague in outline. He was sensible as he stood before the window of the booking office that he received his ticket in exchange for the money he tendered, and that a seat was secured for him in the corner of a smoking carriage; he heard, too, as in the distance, the banging of the doors and the shrill whistle of the guard as the train moved out of the station, but beyond that he was oblivious to all around him. He felt as he sat alone as though some heavy burden, too weighty for him to support, had been laid upon his shoulders, a burden which pressed upon his brain, converting it into a dull leaden substance and robbing him of the power of thought. Again and again, as the iron monster glided along the metals, the sound of his own voice startled and recalled him for an instant to himself as in his misery he called aloud her name, and at such times, as memory

became clearer, he would bury his face in his hands while the hot tears trickled from between his fingers, and his whole frame shook as though he were stricken with ague. Was it unmanly of him? Did it show weakness or want of courage? Was his heart less prone to sympathize with the sufferings of others, and therefore less human, because through his great love he had learned what it was to be bowed down with a load of grief and sorrow? Assuredly not. The mind of man is but half formed and but little capable of sharing in the sentiments and sufferings of those around him, if his life is one long day of pleasure unalloyed by pain. His soul must pass through the furnace of trial before the good seed which lies dormant in his nature can be brought to life. The frosts and snows of winter come in their season, preparing the land for the sower, destroying the evil which would swallow up the tiny atoms of good scattered broadcast, thus permitting the seed to germinate, bud and blossom in the broad light of day. On and on through the darkness of

the night sped the train—under railway arches with a roar, past sleeping villages and restless towns, through insignificant wayside stations which boasted of only one sleepy official, weary of his work, or others, large and important and still not dismantled of their life by the lateness of the hour. Onward, ever onward, it flew, like a huge serpent gliding along a beaten path, and winding in and out midst the surrounding country, bent upon reaching its lair. With scarce a stoppage, for it was an express, Gerard was hurled along the rails, a prey to his own sad thoughts, until at length the streaks of early dawn appeared, speed was slackened, Sidcombe was reached, and he alighted on the platform. Leaving his luggage in the safe keeping of an official until such time as it could be sent for, Gerard buttoned his travelling coat about his neck and strode off in the direction which led by the nearest cut to Clifford's Wood. How familiar he was with every inch of the way, and yet to retread it, young though he was, brought him no pleasure. As his footsteps re-

echoed in the keen frosty air and alone broke the silence of the awakening day, it gave him no comfort to be returning home, safe and sound. The pleasure that he might have experienced was deadened and converted into pain by the thoughts that would come. He was going back to the home of his childhood, it was true, but the sight of the old familiar spots, the trees, the stretch of landscape melting into shadowy mist in the distance as the bright rays of morning light dispersed the gloom—the hedgerows, ay, even the very gate-posts and stiles as he passed them, recalled to him memories of the dead. His father's form, his face and the cheery sounds of that voice he loved so well, but which, alas, was silent now for ever; all, all seemed sadly and vividly to loom in fancy's mirror, clear, as though those recollections of his boyish years were but the thoughts and reminiscences of yesterday. *Yesterday;* to think of it was sharpest punishment of all. Then he had loved, having

the right, thinking himself beloved. To-day his passion was as strong as ever, the only difference being that thereunto had been added *despair*. When last his eyes had lingered upon the turrets of the old house which rose up midst the arching boughs of foliage heavy with the white hoar frost, he had not known *her*. It was true he had felt restless, disturbed, unhappy, yet those dead days were bliss, elysium, as compared with the too, too realistic moments of his present. Not a living soul could he discern as his footsteps sounded on the gravelled drive; not a blind had been drawn up, and the edifice, faultless of its kind as a specimen of an English country house, seemed wrapped in slumber. Slowly he mounted the steps which led to the main entrance, and rang the bell, an operation he repeated several times before the heavy bolts were shot back, and an unfamiliar face reconnoitred him through the chained door.

"It's terrible early to be rousin' folks up out of their beds, but what might you be wantin'?" asked the person in no very civil

tones. The insolence of the man's voice irritated Gerard.

"You may know sooner than you like! Open the door! I am your master."

"Ha! ha! ha! Well! that's a good 'un. Why, 'e's been dead these two months and more; afore I come here, anyhow."

Gerard's cheek paled for an instant. Then they had believed him to be dead. He understood the reason and force of the allusion, but it had never occurred to him before, so absorbed had he been in his own affairs. Now it struck him in all its terrible significance. The man was ignorant, and therefore blameless.

"Do as I tell you! I am Mr. Clarencourt, so let me into my own house."

There was a tone of authority in his words which had the effect of overcoming the man's scruples; he undid the fastenings and ushered Gerard into the hall. As he was crossing it, intent upon entering the dining-room, the sound as of some one descending the staircase caused him to glance around.

"*Mr. Gerard!*"

"*You*, Wilson?"

"Yes, sir, safe and sound! Oh, the sight of you will make a new man of me. Thank God! thank God! You mustn't mind my takin' on so, sir, but I mourned you for dead —you, the last of the family, the only link between me and master. It was more'n I could bear, you as I'd looked after ever since you was born."

The tears stood in Gerard's eyes. This kindly welcome and genuine love displayed for him by his old servant whom he had schooled himself to think of as hopelessly lost to him for time at least, affected him deeply.

"To hear the sound of your voice again is more than I had ever hoped for, Wilson. I have no words to tell you how gald I am to see you safe and well. Close the door and let me hear how you escaped. But first of all, what of my mother?"

"She's not here, sir."

"Where then?"

"She've gone up to London."

"When did she leave?"

"Just a few days. No, I'm wrong; maybe three weeks ago now. The time's hung that heavy, sir, and I've kept no count. Anyhow, she left with most of the servants, and there's not a horse in the stables; she took all of 'em up with her. But don't ask me no more, Mr. Gerard," added Wilson huskily, as though the subject were a painful one to him.

Gerard read his face, and the expression of it aroused his worst fears. He had returned to his home to seek her, *his mother*, as the only being upon earth from whom he might look for consolation in his hour of need. Had the bygone months of separation worked no change, given birth to no new sentiments of love towards him? Would she never learn to regard him as bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh, as the years rolled by and bore her with them towards the tomb? Had this one hope that he had treasured as a bright spot midst the darkening clouds that had

gathered about him, to be relinquished also; and had he none in the whole world into whose ear he might pour the sad tale of his sufferings, of the wreckage and rejection of his *first* strong, passionate love, alas, misplaced and unappreciated? The promptings of his own heart whispered yes. It was the agony endured by so many of us poor creatures of mammon, the grief upon grief, the wormwood added to the gall. In *her* he might have confided. That dream was past, and he must wrestle with and stifle this love that had grown into his nature and wrapped its coils so tenaciously about him, alone! The thought was a bitter one and stung him to the quick, as salt sprinkled upon a bleeding and lacerated wound. He had risen from the chair into which he had flung himself and had paced the room with agitated strides—now he wheeled round almost fiercely upon Wilson, who had busied himself by drawing up the blinds to conceal his own feelings. As he turned from his work with a deep-drawn, irrepressible sigh, he confronted Gerard. The

winter sun was slowly rising, like a huge round ball of fire, scattering and piercing the frosty mist. It shone in through the windows, and its struggling beams of light fell full upon Gerard's face. In the dusk of the hall and in the dim uncertainty of the half-darkened room, Wilson had been able to discern little more than the bare outline of his form and features, but as he looked upon him now, he could ill restrain the cry of horror which rose to his lips.

"So changed, so changed! My God! Mr. Gerard, what ails you? You are ill, you must be, sir. Let me fetch a doctor. I'll be back in a brace o' shakes, for my old legs 'll carry me over the ground wonderful fast when it's for your sake, sir. My boy! my boy!" he added below his breath. A bitter smile curled the corners of Gerard's mouth, which changed into one of kindly sorrow and affection quick as the rays of sunlight bursting from behind a cloud. This one being on earth loved him well and devotedly and would continue to do

so, come good or ill, through riches or poverty, and he knew it.

"A doctor! Why, my good Wilson, what are you thinking of? When have I ever troubled the doctors, unless it was when I turned the whole house topsy-turvy by swallowing a bone or a marble? You think I look knocked up—face pale, heavy circles under eyes, perhaps a somewhat washed-out appearance on the whole. I have no doubt such is the case, but then you must remember I, like you, have gone through much since we last saw each other." Even as he spoke, like a flash of lightning through his mind came the thought of those few words, uttered so heedlessly by Ada Devereaux on that night when he had rescued her from the sinking "Simoom." Few and terse they had been, yet they had lived in his memory ever since.

"'*A love-sick boy!*' She thought that of me then, and my devotion was unworthy of a nobler name in her estimation," he muttered to himself. "Ah, well, she was worldly and I was a fool. Would to God that I could tear

her image from my heart, stamp and crush it out of my very nature. But I can't. She has blasted my life, built up a hell the walls of which encircle my very soul as though strong chains of iron were bound about me. She has done this and I must live on, my life cursed by this woman, while she will forget the evil she has wrought, heedless of it all in her painted butterfly existence, and yet *I love her.*" Whether Wilson had heard the bitter soliloquy to which Gerard had given vent or no, he seemed as if some new light had dawned upon his vision. He walked behind him and touched his arm gently as Gerard, apparently still wrapped up in his own thoughts, stood gazing out at the expanse of garden and pasture land which stretched before him.

"That woman again! I'd hoped that by good luck the water had closed over her head, Mr. Gerard. I don't care whether you strike me for sayin' it. She's at the bottom o' this! Your ruin as sure as there's a God above us. It's she that has made you haggard and worn, sucked the very sap from your beautiful

young life, and aged you twenty years. Curse——"

"Hold your tongue, Wilson, for should one more word leave your lips, good and faithful though you be, you will tempt me to shake the very breath out of your body. I tell you you know not what you do. No other man living should have trifled with her name—used the language you have done, and quitted this room unharmed." Deadly white—his eyes blazing with an unnatural fire, Gerard towered above the shrinking form of Wilson, who, though no coward, was awed into silence by the whirlwind of furious passion he had called forth. Her name to be sullied by the lips of another man! She whom he had set up and worshipped as his idol! She whom for better for worse, no matter what her conduct towards him might be, he would love with the whole strength of his nature. She, *his wife*, to be foully spoken of, *cursed*, for he could not mistake the meaning of the single word which had escaped Wilson's lips. It was too much to expect of him. How should he stay his hand

from dealing out condign punishment even to this man, who had served him long and well, when *her* name was called in question—when *she* was condemned, no matter whether justly or otherwise. For a moment he trembled for himself, doubting his own power to restrain the hot ungovernable impulse which prompted him to strike and spare not, even though his hand were raised against one whom he knew would give his life in exchange for his own. For a moment only he felt that weakness. The tornado which darkens the heavens, shutting out the light of the noonday, discharging its heavy deluge of rain and wind, sweeping everything before it in its ruthless and irresistible fury, but which passes as the thunder-cloud, leaving behind it a track of desolation, though the atmosphere is cleared of every taint and the sun breaks forth with a more dazzling golden splendour, is not unlike the tempest of good and evil which swept through Gerard's mind, leaving him paler and more agitated than before, but otherwise calm and completely master of himself.

"Twice before I have warned you never to mention her name. This is the third time. Let it suffice! Nothing but your long years of honest servitude and the respect I feel for you has enabled me to restrain my passion. God knows, I need the few faithful friends I have too sorely to deal them blows, and yet I would sweep them aside with less compunction than if they were a swarm of stinging flies did they dare to speak of her with aught but respectful reverence. Let this be a lesson. Tempt me no more. For as He hears me who would judge between us both, I fear myself. This has gone by and you need never think of it again, but as you value my regard and your own safety see that it has occurred for the last time. Now tell me all you know about my mother. Answer my questions as I put them, without concealment, for my time is short." The closing words of Gerard's stern reprimand brought fresh feelings into Wilson's mind.

"Surely you're never goin' to leave the old place and them as wishes you well, without

stayin' a night under the roof as has sheltered you ever since you was born, Mr. Gerard?"

"I have business which demands my attention, and I may not remain even one night. But my mother; tell me, has she regretted my absence? and was she grieved when she heard of my supposed demise?"

"If I may be so bold, I'd rather not answer, sir."

"You know my wishes. If you remain silent you can conceal little from me, so reply fully and frankly."

"Well, Mr. Gerard, I've served you and yours long and as I hope honestly; and so you'll not be for takin' my words amiss. It's like tryin' to wring blood out of a stone, makin' me repeat all as I knows. But you insists, so I'll speak the truth and no lies. With no offence, sir, it just seems to me she's no more feelin's for you than if you was a block o' wood. I watched her close, and what I saw was just outside show. We was put into black, me and the servants, for the sake o' appearances, and she went

right away up to London as soon as decency would let her, 'cause in that great place no one asks no questions, and she could live as she likes. It's just this, Mr. Gerard; she ain't not one bit altered, proud and haughty, and without a particle o' feelin' for you. You need look for nothin' in the way o' love from her, sir, and that's all as I knows."

"And—and she displayed no sorrow when she heard I was dead?"

"No more than that table. Why, it's not so long ago like, and yet Whilkes, as is the new footman, says the stables is being altered, new carriages bought, and the siller flung about right and left. But you've no cause to trouble yourself, you've come back and that's the main thing."

"Thanks, Wilson."

And then he added aside, as the colour left his cheeks: "Better a thousand times had I sunk with the old 'Simoom.' Deceived by the woman I love, and yet united to her for life—denied the sympathy and affection I have a right to expect from my own flesh

and blood—doomed at the very outset of my years to live with this cursed load of anguish, doubt and unsatisfied longing gnawing at my very heart's core, death were indeed preferable."

"Mr. Gerard, don't take on so, sir," put in Wilson, who had watched the deepening gloom gather on his features. "It'll all come right. The old place will soon be yours; and as you know, there's no finer estate in the county. You'll live it down, Mr. Gerard, you will, and then who can tell but some fine morning the bells 'll be ringin' for the bright young lassie you'll choose for a wife, ay, and one as 'll know how to bring happiness and peace along with her. There is many a one as——"

"For God's sake say no more, Wilson, or you'll madden me," replied Gerard with passionate utterance. How cruelly the words smote upon his ear; well meant, yet so terribly full of meaning for him. "Fetch me a time-table," he continued, "for the very air I breathe here suffocates me."

Wilson fidgeted about the room as though in doubt what to do or say.

"Then I'll go and get my few bit things ready, if it's pleasin' to you to be off and away again so soon."

"You need not trouble yourself at present; if I require your services I will write for you, and you can join me wherever I may be; but I leave here alone."

"Alone! then what's to become of me? The miles as we've travelled together, and the years as I've been ready at hand to your beck and call, and proud of it too, sir, are to go for nothing, and I'm to be left in the empty house with not a creature as I cares for. Don't do it, Mr. Gerard; don't leave me behind, or maybe I'll not be here when you come back. See here, sir. I'll follow you like a hound to the other end of the world, serve you while there's breath in my body, and ask nothing in return, only leave to be near you."

The tears stood in the poor fellow's eyes, and he grasped his master's hand between

both his own as he spoke. His piteous appeal touched Gerard's heart. It was hard to refuse such a simple request from the only being who appeared to care whether he lived or died; hard to turn away from a noble love thus simply and generously thrust upon him, unactuated by any sordid or selfish motive, and begging for no greater kindness than to be allowed to follow and take what it might please the hand he loved to bestow. And yet Gerard felt that he could not grant his wish, though he hesitated, swayed powerfully by the generous impulses of his kindly nature. The vacillation was but momentary however. To have those about him who knew aught of his life, and perhaps something of his weakness, would be unbearable, for thus a connecting link would be forged between the past and future—the old life and the new. He had made his bed and he must lie down in it, but no eyes save those of strangers must look upon his sufferings.

"It cannot be. It grieves me to say so and refuse what you wish, but just now I cannot do otherwise. I know your worth and how to value such disinterested affection; but what I would ask is that you prove your regard by remaining where you are without seeking to be near me, or to learn my movements. By these means you can best serve me."

With that decision, Wilson, who knew it was useless to remonstrate, was forced to be content, though it must be admitted not without grumblings, and when the up-train from the south coast steamed into the metropolis Gerard alighted upon the platform alone, feeling wofully depressed and sick at heart.

"Why! Gerard, my boy, how changed you are. I scarcely recognized you," were the words that greeted him as he stood midst a crowd of passengers, all anxious to be the first to bear away their luggage. The next instant his fingers were gripped tightly by a grizzled, soldier-like man,

some inches taller than himself, and having the ineffaceable stamp of travel and military service.

"What! *you*, colonel?"

"None other, and glad to welcome you as your father's son. The likeness between you is striking, and thanks to that I suppose I recognized you, for it must be years since I saw you last. Then, I recollect, you seemed to be unhappy without a fishing-rod in the shape of a bean stick in your hand, and your pockets a receptacle for red worms with which you proposed to slay the finny tribe. You see my memory serves me well."

"It does, indeed, colonel, but I knew *you* at once."

"A few days later and many a mile of water would have divided us. But what's wrong with you? Ah! the old game, I suppose. Sad dogs, you young fellows. Better come with me."

"Where to?"

"The Cape. More rows out there, you

know. Egad! I feel ten years younger with the prospect of some excitement."

Such a proposal to a man in Gerard's state of mind was one highly calculated to meet with his approval. There appeared to be a fair chance of losing himself and burying the past in the tempting offer held out to him of new scenes and the probability, considering the disturbed state of Southern Africa, of fresh perils to be encountered.

"Do you mean what you say? Because, if so, I'm your man, colonel," he replied, as he turned to that gentleman, who was busily engaged in manipulating a cigar to his liking, while he indicated to a porter his ownership of several leathern cases and portmanteaus, which were each, as he said, marked with his name, Colonel Bethune.

"Never more in earnest in my life. We'll have these traps piled up, and if you'll drive with me to my club, we'll dine together and discuss matters over a good cigar and some wine that you will never regret having tasted, I promise you."

Gerard expressed his willing compliance, and in a moment more the hansom they had entered quitted the station and was lost in the surging sea of carriages.

CHAPTER XII.

FAREWELL.

Mrs. Clarencourt stood gazing out of the window of her drawing-room. She could catch a glimpse of Park Lane from her post of vantage; and beyond, though the thick, yellow fog obstructed her vision, she could just discern the outline of the carriages which plied to and fro in the Park. The prospect, to say the least of it, was not a cheering one; and she turned away with an exclamation of disgust, and a very decided expression of annoyance was discernible on her face, as seen by the flickering fire-light.

"What can have detained him? He must have received my note; *that cannot* have miscarried, and yet he is half-an-hour late," she mused. Her hand was on the bell, and she was about to ring it to request that lights

might be brought, when the door was flung open, and the servant announced :

" Colonel Cheston."

" Ah ; how do you do, colonel," she said, as she advanced towards him ; and then as the door closed, added, " I was beginning to conjure up a host of absurd doubts to account for your non-appearance."

" Why, am I late ? " inquired the gentleman addressed, as he advanced to the fire and extended his hands to the blaze, evidently quite at home with his surroundings.

" Late ! of course you are. It is needless for me to ask whether you got my note, for otherwise you would not have been here yet."

" I am here ; and so I would suggest that you make the best of me, and forgive my delinquency on the ground that I am as sorry as yourself for the delay. But the truth is, business detained me at the Horse Guards."

" Business ! always that horrid excuse. I can remember the time, Frank, when it was otherwise with you. Now, a perfect host of engagements crop up. You have an appoint-

ment at your club; you must dine, or drive, or do anything but——"

"Be with you, you would add. Believe me, it is not so. Some misunderstandings have arisen of late between us. I am here to-night to explain them, and cause them to vanish into thin air. In the first place, it was not in my power to meet you at the theatre. I will tell you *why*, should you care to hear. Secondly, I will find an antidote to all our grievances in a very few words."

"Why, you cannot mean that——"

"I am free. Yes; I do. Free as the wind. The case has gone in my favour. My counsel made good use of the evidence furnished; and my wife is a thing of the past. I need not pause to pick and choose my words with you now, I am——"

The remainder of the gallant colonel's sentence was interrupted by the door being flung open to admit the person of Gerard Clarencourt. He had accepted the offer made to him by Colonel Bethune. He would go to Africa. Why not? None cared, and

perhaps a new life, midst dangers to be encountered at every turn of the road, might aid him in his endeavour to sink the past in the present. Failing that, there was the other chance left him, for he had not forgotten that every bullet has its billet, and there was a possibility that one might stray his way. And so he had decided to go, but at the last moment his better nature forbade that he should quit English soil without a farewell to his mother, and with that intent he had dropped in upon the scene described. The dim light which pervaded the apartment prevented him in some degree from making the immediate discovery that he had come inopportunely, and yet, somehow, an instinctive feeling seemed to tell him that he was not wanted. Mrs. Clarencourt could scarcely contain herself. Colonel Cheston had been interrupted in his declaration of love, but what was a thousand times worse, her son was the cause of it. Her son, whom the colonel had been led to believe was no longer in the land of the living, though, to do her

justice, she had had no opportunity of informing him to the contrary since she had been apprised of his return by her solicitors. Oddly enough, about the only person in the world whom she cared for was Colonel Cheston, an old flame—a man many years her senior—married, and the father of a whole regiment of young hopefuls. She loved him, perhaps the more because she knew her hold upon him was a feeble one, and had been considerably strengthened by the turn affairs had taken when she had stated that her son was dead, and the Clarencourt estates were actually hers, at all events during her life. It had made a big difference, that little coincidence, for, although she considered that Francis Cheston was not indifferent to her, she knew him too well to think that he would contrive to rid himself of one wife to take another through whom no pecuniary benefits would accrue to him. The weight consequent upon her supposed accession to wealth had turned the scale, and she had been content. Her feelings, therefore, when she received a

letter informing her that Gerard was alive, and actually in London, were a mixture of rage, followed by a determination to play her cards as well as circumstances would permit, and to marry Cheston at all hazard. Now had come upon her a fatal *exposé* which would mar her plans, and her son was at the bottom of it. It is often so in life, and yet not unjustly, for as we sow so shall we reap. She had married for *money*, wrecked one man's life, and hurried him into an early grave, yet that which she had sold herself for was not hers, and the want of it would leave her desire unfulfilled. She shook with a passion wellnigh beyond her control as these thoughts pressed upon her. Her painted fan, the ornaments, books, *anything*, she could have flung in her son's face in her desire to rid herself for ever of his presence.

"Colonel Cheston. My son." The words of introduction almost choked her, but she uttered them somehow, and then sank into a chair. Gerard had kissed her, and she had returned the salute with a coldness that he

could not mistake, and thus, after the lapse of time and his escape from many a danger, privation, and death, they met again.

"Glad to meet you. Have often heard of you, of course; am an old friend of your mother's," answered the colonel; and then he added, addressing Mrs. Clarencourt, "I congratulate you upon the possession of such a strapping fellow for a son. No compliment, sir. You'd do credit to any corps."

"You do me much honour."

"Not a bit. You have come from abroad?"

"Where I return shortly," replied Gerard stiffly, meaning the words principally for his mother.

"Indeed."

"Yes."

"Well, come and look me up at the club. The Carlton. Glad to see you any time. Don't forget. Thanks, no tea."

Ten minutes after Gerard's entrance the wily colonel made his adieux, and clanked down the stairs to the tune of inward thoughts such as these:

"Egad! deuced lucky the young 'un turned up. Takes every cent when he's twenty-five. None of the needful to be got at, and *saddled* with *another* woman. By Jove! I know her! Wasn't she wild when he came in, and won't he drop in for it? Ha! ha! ha! It's as good as a play, and Frank, my boy, a fluke has saved you by a short neck." Well pleased with his luck the colonel strolled off to his club, when billiards and B. and S. caused him rapidly to forget the event.

A prolonged and awkward silence prevailed in the room just vacated by Cheston. Mother and son were alone; but neither appeared to wish to be the first to speak. Gerard was prevented by conflicting and painful emotions, easily understood, which rendered him tongue-tied. Mrs. Clarencourt refrained from speech for two very good reasons. First, her passion prevented her utterance—secondly, she preferred that he should break the stillness which she well knew was the lull preceding the storm. At last he did. But the few

words she was listening for, gently though they were uttered, did not influence her reply.

"Mother, I have come here to bid you good-bye before leaving this country for an indefinite period. I regret much that my visit was so ill-timed, but——"

"Oh, you need not trouble yourself to apologize, though you might have made use of the nearest telegraph office. But Colonel Cheston is a very old friend, so it does not signify."

"And as such he is welcome to come and go at will, though *I*, your son, am not. Since I left you at Clifford's Wood I have escaped many a danger, and for days I despaired of ever seeing you again. Yet now, after it all, have you no more love for me than that you receive me thus?"

"You seem to forget it is not my way to show my regard for you by giving vent to an outburst of maternal affection, as though I were an escaped lunatic. I have

kissed you and am glad to see you. What more can I do or say?"

"Nothing—nothing, because you do not feel it. *Kissed me!* True. The same kiss which I seem to feel upon my forehead now, cold and without one atom of love, which you gave me when you stood upon the steps at home. But what use to refer to it again? I have never told you, but you shall hear it now——"

"Gerard, the sufferings you have endured must have affected your reason, for I have never heard you speak so wildly. Sit down, and tell me about yourself, all that you have seen and your plans for the future. Will you have some tea?"

"Tea! You would ask me that as calmly were I dying, I suppose. To confess all I have felt for you, and endured because of your treatment of me, would be to show my weakness, so the tale shall remain for ever untold. I will end this absurd scene."

"If you have come here to upbraid me with want of love and neglect of duty

towards you, better do so at once. You have had since your infancy every wish gratified that money lavishly spent upon you could procure."

"And I would have bartered it all that I might stand before you impoverished, but with the knowledge that I might count on you for sympathy and affection."

"You have been pampered and spoilt, and this is the end of it. Pray how much longer is this tirade of abuse likely to last? Because I am due at Lady Pumpington's at seven, and since I must dress I cannot possibly spare you more than ten minutes."

The conclusion of her sentence was due to the fact that she suddenly remembered the invitation which she had accepted and would not have missed upon any account.

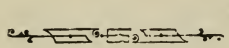
"Ten minutes, and though I leave by the next mail, which sails to-morrow for Africa, you have no more time at your disposal to bestow upon me?"

"How very absurd! You should have

wired. I *must* go to the Pumpingtons. Come and see me to-morrow. Oh! I forgot, you——"

"Yes, I sail. But, no matter. To prolong this discussion would be painful to us both. Farewell, and may your friends prove more true to you (should the hour to test them ever come) than you have been to me. Farewell—who knows?—perhaps for ever."

Mrs. Clarencourt heard the door close and the sound of Gerard's footsteps, as they re-echoed on the pavement and died away in the distance, without a pang. The news that he was going abroad was welcome intelligence rather than otherwise. But the colonel, she should see him as soon as possible. Delay would be fatal, and she must have him in leading strings.



CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT OF HIM?

For days Gerard's wife had risen in the morning, entered her luxuriously furnished sitting-room, and breakfasted in silence, save for the noise made by the creaking boots of the waiter, the ordinary sounds of thriving hotel life, and the monotonous tick, tick of the clock. On the night that Gerard left her she had sat up longer than was her wont, but had grown weary as the fire languished, and the icy chill of the early morning penetrated the apartment, causing her to shiver. Tired at length of keeping watch, she had betaken herself to rest, and fallen sound asleep, never doubting that her husband would return; it might be when it pleased him, but return of course. It never occurred to her that there *was* a chance that he *might*

not. She was used to men and their ways, at least so she thought, and vain, empty threats, a display of ungovernable passion seldom held sway for long, when the cheerful influence of a good cigar, some Scotch whiskey, and a jovial chat over the blazing club fire were pitted against it. Colonel Devereaux, her late husband, had been much given to such ebullitions of temper, and she had grown accustomed to them. But then he had been her slave; old enough in years to have passed as her father, and though brave as a lion, the hero of many a sharp skirmish under galling fires, and surrounded by numberless dusky foes, he was no match for his young wife. His whole affections were engaged and centred in her, while hers were free. She did not love him, but she used him as her tool. He was the puppet, and she pulled the strings when and how she pleased. Her history was a simple one, and to understand her nature it would be well to skim briefly through the turned-down pages of her life, in order to throw a light upon her character,

which had been naturally moulded by past relations and events. Ada was the eldest of three children. Her father, the Rev. Charles Blanchard, was a needy Church of England clergyman, of good family, his wife of Scotch extraction. Want of means doubtless actuated many of their precepts, which had savoured, perhaps, too much of number one, and to that end they had taught their children to ignore sentiment, which they regarded as the shadow, and to cling to something tangible in the form of the bone, which meant money. These precepts, in Ada's case, seemed as though they had been sown upon barren soil when, at the age of sixteen, she had evinced a strong affection for a handsome but penniless young fellow of her acquaintance, whose parents unluckily chanced to be old and sworn friends of the family. This simple fact had given him *carte blanche* to come and go as he listed. He was successful in his endeavour to win her affection, and much against the wish of her family she had clung to her youthful admirer. To cut a

long tale short, his treatment of her had been unworthy of a gentleman, and his secret craving for money, though by no means his worst fault, had been gratified by a hasty wedding, which had been hurriedly celebrated to prevent the breath of scandal from damaging the fair fame of a plain but wealthy heiress of whom he pretended to be enamoured. After this circumstance Ada Blanchard had discovered that her pride forbade her to remain at home. A tax upon her father's slender means at all times, he who was the quintessence of a worldly man, despite his cloth, never forgave her indiscretion, and seemed to have left no stone unturned to rid himself of the care and responsibility of providing for a daughter who had so neglected his teachings. He never once lost sight of an opportunity of pressing upon her the necessity for quitting his side, and so Ada at length succumbed to the coercion which made life at the country parsonage wellnigh unbearable to her, and launched forth upon the world as governess to a family of the name of Dailey, the eldest son

of whom (Geoffrey) she had met, as described, in Calcutta under his uncle's patronymic of Carelesse. Her father's sudden and unlooked-for death had recalled her home after a brief experience in the above-mentioned capacity, and this change back to her old life had brought her into contact with Colonel Devereaux, who had returned from India on leave. Owing to her mother's persuasion Ada had at length consented to marry the good-hearted, love-stricken old Indian officer, for whom she had never experienced even the semblance of affection, and thus, though curtly, the whole outline of her existence has been sketched. The good and admirable points in her character had been nipped in the bud by an early disappointment, a loveless marriage, and an Indian garrison life, which fate had ordained should be led midst people but ill fitted to be the mentors of a young and inexperienced girl.

Two letters attracted her attention one day as she returned to the Langham, after a soli-

tary peregrination which had terminated in the Piccadilly Circus. She took up the first and then threw it down again, as the handwriting was unfamiliar to her, but the superscription of the second she recognized.

"From Gerard. And so he has deigned to write at length to ask my forgiveness, I suppose. I might extend it on certain conditions, but he shall *beg* humbly first. Why, what is this?" she exclaimed, as her eye scanned the lines, which ran as follows:

"ADA,—

"I write, not to upbraid you, but simply to inform you that my decision to leave you and for ever was no vain and empty threat. When this reaches you I shall have quitted this country. Where I have gone matters not. I will strive to forgive as I hope to be forgiven. Should business necessitate a communication, you will write through my solicitors, to whom I have given instructions.

"GERARD."

For the space of a few moments she remained speechless, whilst she read the note over again. Then she dashed it down upon the table, as though the obnoxious paper had of itself offended her. An April shower, with the darkening clouds, the gusts of wind, and the torrents of blinding rain, or the sand storm, carrying everything before it in its sudden, mighty fury, was never quicker or more wrathful than the passion which flashed in dangerous, steely light from her eyes—and surged through her frame, until she shook from head to foot.

"And he has dared to leave me—*leave me!* as though I were a cast-off garment, to be laid aside, or resumed, as the fit seizes him!—gone abroad, and turned his back upon me, though I bear his name! Deserted me, as though I were a thing unworthy of his love—I who have had men grovelling at my feet, with trembling lips imploring me to extend my hand to them, or what I chose to fling, so long as I would stoop, and let them call me their own!—*I*, who *could* have done with

them as I would—spurned them from me—covered them with dismay by means of a stinging satire which the dolts knew not how to parry, or enticed them to my side again, subservient, and with all their pride turned traitor to them because I pleased to smile! And now—now, I am wedded to this love-sick—no, no! not that, for he cannot care for me—this *boy;* he has chosen to show that he dare insult me by leaving me as sole legacy his name! 'Mrs. Gerard Clarencourt' sounds very well, but what of him—where has he gone? People will wonder, and I shall appear in the eyes of the world the fool I am! And yet, it's not *that* only. Oh! Gerard, I—I shall go mad!"

Sinking into a chair, she covered her face with her hands, and sobbed aloud. Could Gerard have seen her then, as her wounded pride sought shelter in that flood of tears, he might have learnt that a nature such as hers can be tamed and brought to submission, should he chance to place his finger on the key-note which had been touched but

once, and then lightly, in her girlish years.

"Who is this from? His solicitor, I suppose," she said to herself, after she had mastered her emotion sufficiently to glance at the other envelope which bore her name. The words seemed blurred and indistinct as she strove to decipher them through the mist of half-dried tears, but they read thus:

"Lincoln's Inn, 18—.

"DEAR MADAM,

"Our client, Mr. Gerard Clarencourt, has instructed us to pay to you the sum of four hundred pounds (£400) per annum. Will you kindly favour us by communicating your wishes on the matter? Any letters you may desire to send to him will be forwarded by us.

"We are, dear madam,

"Yours obediently,

"FERRIT & FLUKEM."

Ada had been too much absorbed in her

own affairs to notice that whilst she was reading the door had been opened to admit the person of a woman; but her thoughts were scattered to the wind by hearing a voice exclaim:

"Ah! madam, at last I have found you. Ah! *mon Dieu!* I shall not leave you again."

"What! you, Julie?—and alive! How did you escape? You startled me terribly," exclaimed Ada, as her eyes fell upon the familiar figure of the soubrette whom she had last seen on the night that she had quitted the sinking "Simoom."

"Escape, madam? I do not know—so much trouble and danger have I been through. I was on what you call a raft, and I was saved by another ship; but—ah! it makes me tremble even to think of it."

"Who told you where to find me?"

"With my own eyes, madam, I did see you enter this hotel. I walk, walk till I was tired. Then I did see your figure, well, I was too late, though I run you did disappear. Then I ask a tall *garçon*—what you call

waiter—for Madame Devereaux. 'No such lady live here,' he answer. Well, madam, I did go away very much fatigued. Then I remember, Monsieur Gerard Clarencourt——"

"Yes, go on," interrupted Ada.

"Well, I remember you love him. No, no, madam; not that. He love you. Well, I come back. I ask for Madame Clarencourt, and here I am; and never, never, will I go away again."

During the whole of Julie's explanation Ada had sat with her head resting on her hand, apparently deeply interested in what she heard, but in reality she was puzzling her brains for an excuse to rid herself of her unexpected visitor. She liked the woman well enough as an attendant, but it would be impossible for her to retain her in her service for several reasons, the principal one of which was that Julie had become acquainted with the fact of her marriage; and now that Gerard had gone, her pride would not suffer her to keep about her person one in whom she felt she could place no confidence, yet who was

acquainted with her secret, for as such she had begun to look upon her union. There would be no stopping her tongue; at all events, she preferred not to try the experiment. No; Julie must go, beyond a doubt, and seek for suitable employment elsewhere. On that point, even while the woman was speaking, she had determined. But how to get rid of her without a scene? That was the question.

"And so you will not leave me again, Julie?" at length she asked.

"Madame?"

"You wish to remain with me, I understood you to say."

"Yes, madame. I have found you, and now I stay, if madame pleases."

"But it does not please me, Julie, I regret to say. Do not misunderstand me. I am glad to see that you have escaped with your life, very. I know you must have suffered much; and I will aid you, so far as I can, to secure another situation, but I cannot keep you with me."

"Madame does not mean what she says; she cannot—it is impossible. I have been faithful. Madame has no fault to find."

"None whatever, Julie; and if the strongest testimony that I can write of your worth and character will be of use to you, you shall have it."

"But, Madame, Mon ——"

And my only regret is that circumstances oblige me to discharge you. But the fact remains. I can keep you no longer."

The dark, piercing eyes of the French girl sparkled vindictively, and a hectic flush mantled in her sallow cheeks, as she listened to the words of her dismissal. She looked capable of anything in the way of retaliation, and not at all likely to renounce without a struggle the easy and lucrative post she had held. The feeling that it was slipping from her grasp roused her quick southern temper. Yet she bridled it for a moment, hoping that all was not yet lost, and replied in a soft, fawning voice:

"Madame will think better of this. She

cannot be so cruel as to dismiss her faithful Julie in this great city of London, where she has no friends, no money, no situation. Ah, madame will be merciful."

"So much so, that to prove it I will, as I said, write you this letter—pay your wages in full up to the date of a month hence, and your railway fare back to any part of France, so that you need not be separated from your home and friends. But to a more lenient decision I cannot come, since it is impossible that you can remain with me."

Julie had one more card to play, one more appeal to make, and it was characteristic rather than otherwise.

"Then, madame, I will not live to starve and beg my way. If madame will not have me I will die—I will kill myself."

Having delivered this threat, she paused to watch the effect; but it only caused Ada to rise from her chair and seat herself before a davenport. Neither spoke; but the scratching noise made by a quill pen told her that her mistress was writing rapidly.

At length she seemed to have ended, and she turned to Julie with a letter in her hand.

"You will find this note satisfactory. I have spoken highly of you; and if you will give me a receipt for this money, I will pay you as I have proposed."

"This is impossible—absurd. I must go without notice, anywhere, anyhow, as madame chooses. Ah, *sacré!* Madame forgets I am no dog to be beaten and sent away. I will not forgive. Where is Monsieur Clarencourt? Ha, ha, ha! A husband—how droll! Where is madame's character? Doubtless madame will pause to consider, or she will pay me to hold my tongue and save her fair fame."

The insolence of the woman's speech, so irritating and so unexpected, threw Ada for a moment completely off her guard. She could scarcely believe her ears; that this menial whom she had loaded with kindness, and upon whom she had heaped ungrudgingly any benefits that she could bestow, should address her insolently, and menace her with threats. Yet such was the case, and unblush-

ingly Julie stood before her awaiting a reply. Ada had meant to deal kindly as she could, but her good intentions had been frustrated, and insults heaped upon her. Should she bandy words with her servant? No; such impertinence was not to be borne. To think, with Ada, was to act, and swiftly. Yet her white hand trembled for an instant as her fingers pressed the knob of the electric bell. She threw the note on the table together with the money, for she would not take from the woman the character she had written; it might serve her in good stead, and perhaps she would learn wisdom. Then she waited without a word until her summons should be attended to. As the door opened and a servant appeared, she waved her hand towards Julie:

"Show this person out. Give her this money and obtain an acknowledgment from her."

Julie saw that the game was up, and that she had lost; but she could not resist firing one parting shot as she retreated. Her black

eyes glistened like those of a serpent, and she stamped her foot to the tune of a volley of French oaths too disgusting to be repeated.

"Good! Adieu, Madame Clarencourt, *if such* is your name, though madame will admit that I have as much right to it as herself. *Sacré diable!* I can hate, as I have told madame, and she shall live to remember this day."

The waiter used some slight force and drew her from the room, leaving Ada alone to recover her equanimity.

CHAPTER XIV.

WITH ALL MY HEART.

A BOAT was being rowed lazily, and with uneven strokes, within gun-shot of a villa on the shores of the Mediterranean. The sun blazed down with a fiery heat, and as a protection from his scorching rays, a gay-coloured cotton awning covered the painted stern of the pleasure vessel. Ringing peals of laughter, as though the glad feelings of happy hearts found vent and expression in bubbling mirth, reverberated across the bright blue heaving water, and passed in at the open venetian windows of the toy villa which stood but a stone's-throw from the edge of the sea, midst a cluster of tall, plumed palms and bright-hued tropical flowers—a rich man's plaything—and the fortunate Crœsus sat within, surrounded by

every luxury that money could pay for and art devise—easy lounges, rich Eastern mats, a superb physique, a first-rate cigar—pshaw! why try to enumerate the good things which are at the disposal of him whose exchequer is as fathomless as his appetite is keen to enjoy? And yet, as this man reclined on his silken cushions, and watched the pale blue rings of smoke, which curled from his bearded lips, blown back by the soft salt breeze, he sighed, and lines of care were deep marked on his brow. Why was it? What caused it? As well ask the wind whither it blows, or the storm why it descends, as seek to learn the reason why men are prone to take to themselves troubles. *Mes frères*, the only answer to the query is to be found in the few words, *le bon Dieu*—his will. And as well might one seek to turn that wind or stay that storm as fly from sorrow. The owner of the *bijou* villa looked sadly ill at ease; and, worst of all, it seemed no new or transitory grief. He fidgeted, got up, and turned towards the open window, so wrapped in his own

thoughts that he never noticed the entrance of a servant who stood by his elbow with letters, and reminded him of his presence twice before attracting his attention.

"Thanks," he murmured as he took them, and read his own name, "Sir George Fabyn, Bart.," inscribed upon the envelope. "And one for Lilian, too," he added, as he noticed that one of the documents was addressed to his daughter. "Who can it be from? And it bears the Sidcombe postmark, too. Well, whoever writes like that should be taught from the beginning again. Lucky every envelope is not decorated with such a precious scrawl, or the postman's work would never be ended. And the fellow can't spell, either. Really, I am as curious as a woman to find out who has sent it."

He stepped out into the glare of the sunlight, on to the marble terrace. At that moment the keel of the boat grated on the beach, and Lilian stepped ashore, and came slowly over the sand towards him.

"Something for you, little one," Sir George called out as he held up the letter.

"For me, father?"

"Yes. What were you all laughing at? I could hear you plainly even here. I knew such air as this would do you good; and of late you have been more like your old self again. There, come inside and read it."

Together they re-entered the house, his arm about her waist, his face bent towards her. She knew who the note was from well enough.

"You dear old thing, now I know you have been wondering who my illiterate correspondent can be, haven't you?"

"Well, I confess I have."

"Then I shan't tell you," she retorted as she broke the seal.

"To look at your face and know that hourly you are gaining strength is enough for me. But what is it, Lilian? What is it? You cannot deceive me, something is wrong!"

"No, no; nothing, father," she answered,

though her face was white and set, and the effort it cost her to speak was evidently no small one.

"Lilian, do not try to put me off in that way. I have a right to know what grieves you. None can have a better. For I love you, dear, with the honest love of a father for his only child."

No answer came from Lilian, as with nervous fingers she crumpled the paper in her hand. How changed was her face! Altered completely by the weeks of weary sickness she had endured since that day when she saved her tiny spaniel from the returning tide on the Shark's Tooth reef at Sidcombe. Then, her lithe, active figure was rounded and graceful in every curve and line; her cheeks aglow with health; and the nut-brown depths of her eyes beamed with an ever-changing light, full of hope, full of truth and love as now, but with naught of sadness. Love makes fools of us all. Certainly Lilian Fabyn had not passed unscathed by Cupid's arrows. A young and lovely girl, in the

springtime of her life, before her budding girlhood has burst forth into the full-blown magnificence of the woman, is at all times most beautiful, for the world has not yet sullied her, fortune has not frowned. Yet the finger of ill-health, the breath of sorrow, lends a subtle charm; and Lilian, as she strove to hide her feelings, looked something more than beautiful, at least, in the eyes of her doting father, who watched and waited anxiously for the reply which did not come.

"Lilian," at length he said gently, "what troubles you? Will you not confide in me?"

How soft was his touch, how kindly his tone and courtly his grace, as he asked her to place her secrets in his keeping! Another pause—moments of keen anguish to him, for he saw her suffering—and then came the reply:

"Do not ask me, father. My weakness has betrayed me. I should have known that fortune had no happiness in store for me. Blighted hopes! blighted health! Would to God that I were dead, for then, at least, I should have peace. What is it that drags me

down, robs me of my spirits, my health, my desire to live? Read that and it will tell you. But some one is coming—I hear footsteps—it is Mr. Ledsham. Father, he must not see me like this."

Sir George sprang up, and encountered the Honourable Jim just as he was about to enter the room.

"Pardon me, Ledsham; I wish to speak to my daughter alone. You will find some cigars in the smoke room; order some claret, and I will join you in a few minutes."

Jim Ledsham gave utterance to a low and prolonged phew of astonishment, and went off to enjoy his smoke with a grin on his face and the firm conviction that he was the subject of the private confab. Sir George returned to Lilian, and hastily scanned the few crabbed lines which were a second attempt on Wilson's part to redeem the promise he had made to Lilian in the breakfast-room at The Towers. In the first, he had told her of Gerard Clarencourt's safety and return, and now he wrote again to say that he had sailed for foreign

parts, whither, he knew not. Sir George read it all at a glance, and a grave shadow of gloom and doubt crossed his features. Lilian loved Gerard Clarencourt beyond a doubt, but the very fact of his having gone abroad spoke volumes more than he wished to know—told what he would have given every thing he possessed to have prevented. It told him only too plainly that his daughter's affection was misplaced. It wounded his pride. It was bitterness itself to him to think that she, his only child, had stooped to love a man who did not care for her, and the pride of his race rebelled against the indignity.

"You love this man?" at length he said, gravely.

"With all my heart and soul. Better than my life, which I would give a thousand times over for his."

"So much as that? Can you not tear his image from your heart, and replace it with another? He does not care for you, I fear. Lilian, you must try and conquer this feeling for my sake. Tell me that you will *try*. That

you will not seek to see him again until you are no longer free to think of him."

"I cannot; anything that is in my power to do for you, I would. Have you not loved me all these years? I am not, and never can be worthy of all that you have done for me. But you may as well bid me throw away my life, or all that makes it worth living, as do this."

"And does he know this, Lilian? Tell me frankly, has he the slightest suspicion that you care for him?"

"None."

"Thank God, my child. *That* thought was the worst of all to bear. Your secret is in my hands, and trust me, I know how to keep it. Quick! leave me, for your mother comes, and she must not see traces of these tears." Hastily Sir George kissed Lilian's trembling lips, and as he left the room to avoid meeting his wife, he muttered to himself:

"She loves him. Then, by heaven! she shall marry him."

CHAPTER XV.

CASHIERED.

"GEOFFREY, old fellow! Is this true?" inquired Garrick as he entered Carelesse's quarters, splashed with mud, heated and way-worn. "I have only just returned to camp, and the first thing I hear is that——"

"What?"

"Well, excuse me for saying so, but facts are facts—that you have made a deuced idiot of yourself?"

"If that is the only consolation you have to offer me, my words to you are those that I should use to any one and every one who came to me at such a time, and used such language. Go to the devil!"

"Thanks; but I have no intention of becoming more intimately acquainted with his satanic majesty just yet, and if you consigned

me to his keeping a thousand times, I should return good for evil, not from any saintly disposition, but because my name is simply Frank Garrick, whose word is better than his bond, the one being useless, or next door to it, whilst of the other I leave you to judge. Yes, despite this old hydra-headed scoundrel Steele, your friend I have been, and will continue to be to the end of the chapter. Never came out with such a long-winded sentence at one shot since I can remember anything, but 'pon my soul, I could have fallen off my horse like a dead pine log with astonishment and annoyance when I heard the news."

"You're a good sort, Garrick, and the best friend I have, I know, but I'm done for this time," replied Geoffrey Carelesse; and his face clouded over with the despair he felt as he spoke the words.

"Never say die, my boy. If I can be of use you know I will, somehow; but have a cheroot and tell me all about it."

"Thanks."

"Now for the story, and stick to facts *pur et simple*, or I shall get mixed. Did you strike him?" continued Garrick, as he watched Carelesse light the cheroot and puff at it coolly until it resembled a tiny knob of live red coal in the growing gloom of the Afghan night.

"Yes; and would do so again under the same circumstances."

"And they were——"

"That he dared to malign the woman I love. I don't mind making a clean breast of it to you, Garrick, because I know you're my friend."

"That's settled; go on. But the name of the fair one. Who is she?"

"Mrs. Devereaux—Ada Devereaux—you remember?"

"Rather—well?"

"The way of it was this. Steele and I were standing together you know, with a view to buy a new charger. Two or three were being trotted up and down so that he might make his selection. Though I hate him, and have

since the day we met, he has always given me credit for knowing a horse when I see one, and that I suppose was his reason for asking my opinion. You know his beastly, coarse way of alluding to women; well, d—n him, he was in the middle of one of his stories, which would have done credit to a Thames bargee, when all at once, without rhyme or reason, he made use of Ada Devereaux's name in a sense which left no doubt as to the meaning of his words, poked me in the ribs in his confounded familiar way when he gets in that mood, called me a sly dog, and threw out hints, the import of which I will leave you to guess since I cannot repeat them. The result was that I struck him, the pitiful hound! Would to heaven I had handled him more roughly, but I was dragged off, arrested, and—now you know all."

"And 'tis enough, and more than enough. But tell me, who saw it?"

"Oh, I don't know. Half the men in the regiment."

"I'd bet every sou I have to a broken tent-peg that he has been planning this ever since we left Calcutta. Jealousy, my boy, is at the bottom of it all. He failed to make the running with her; you did, or he thought you did, which amounts to the same thing. But how to get you clear of such a scrape would puzzle a wiser head than mine," rejoined Garrick. "There is not a man in the regiment who likes him, and yet he has played his hand against ours combined, with the result——"

"That I'm done for," burst in Carelesse bitterly.

"And all for the sake of a woman who isn't worth the candle."

"Garrick, you don't blame me?"

"Not I; only I would to heaven that you could have controlled your temper for your own sake and—and mine. If you leave the regiment I go too, as soon as I can effect an exchange, though what good will that do? We shall never meet. You have heard my history, and you know the position I should

hold now if it had not been for a woman, and yet you have never taken it to heart and learnt wisdom."

"No. I fling wisdom to the winds when the being I love a thousand times better than anything else on earth is insulted, although I have never had a line from her in answer to my repeated letters."

"If—if this court-martial should go against you, and——"

"I am cashiered, as I shall be without doubt."

"Exactly. What do you intend to do?" inquired Garrick, as he turned his handsome face, which beamed with a kindly light towards his friend and brother officer.

"I don't know. It means ruin to me, and I have not learned to contemplate it coolly enough to build up plans for the future."

"Promise me one thing," said Garrick at length, after a pause of some minutes, and with his own voice thick and husky from the emotion he felt.

"I promise."

"Never let us lose sight of each other, no matter how many miles may separate us, and count upon me as you would upon yourself. Here is my hand upon it to seal the contract. You are down on your luck now, so I may say all this without offending or worrying you, Good-night, Geoffrey, and God bless you, old boy, wherever you may be."

Silence is sometimes more eloquent than words. When one bids good-bye to those he loves best on earth, and watches them sail away, it may be to some distant clime, and for a seemingly interminable space of years—or stands, perhaps, by the bedside of the dear one from whose weakened form the flickering light of life is slowly waning, and gazes upon that changing face that he has learned to love; sees, alas! too plainly the glazing eye, feels the flagging, worn-out pulse, and knows that the spirit is crossing to the other side—then comes that awe-stricken silence which is more full

of meaning than a wealth of well-turned phrases. So it was that neither of these men spoke as hand clasped hand, and the tall, soldierly figure of Frank Garrick disappeared through the opening of the tent and was clearly outlined against the sky for a few seconds before his form blended with the shades of night as he sought his quarters. Left alone, with his sad thoughts as sole companions, Geoffrey Carelesse sleeplessly passed the weary hours of that night, the morrow of which was to see him openly disgraced and cast adrift upon the world —that censorious and severely critical world, so termed, of fashion, which would henceforth regard him as a lost sheep, whose character was too deeply tarnished to permit of its ever being re-burnished. All that could befriend him was time and the oblivion which it brings with it. The man who is on the eve of drowning beholds the whole of his past clearly as though reflected in some huge mirror. He who stands upon the verge of inevitable ruin does the

same. His childish likings and aspirations, his boyish dreams of far away untrodden paths of honour, his manhood's loves, hates, and ambitions—all—all—rise up and are brought near to him by memory's accusing might. So sped that night of tortuous length, minutes seeming hours, and hours years, but ere the sun had travelled westward and once more sunk behind the distant, snow-clad summits of the Hindoo Koosh, Geoffrey Carelesse had realized his worst fears, and learned that despite all the influence brought to bear on his behalf, the sentence which condemned him to dismissal had been irrevocably pronounced, and summed up in that one dread word *cashiered*.

END OF VOL. II.

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